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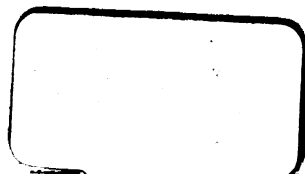
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**Gregg**

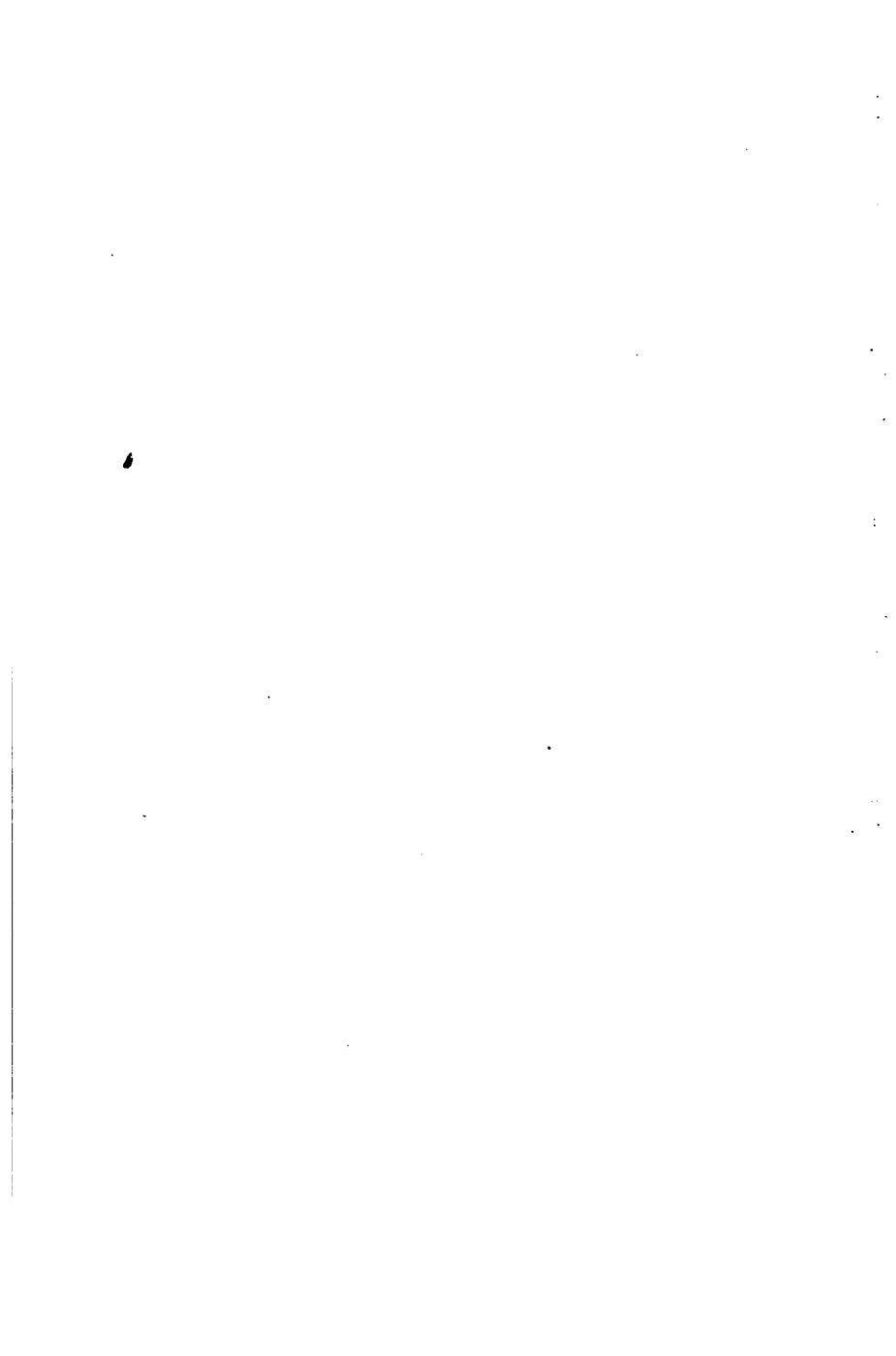
*by*

**Fleta  
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**GREGG**

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# GREGG

A NOVEL

By

Fleta Campbell Springer



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GREGG

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*Whatever of truth, whatever of strength,  
whatever of kindness there is in this book*

*I dedicate to*

**MY MOTHER**



**GREGG**



# GREGG



## CHAPTER I

**I**F, on the day Monica West came to see me in the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, to ask, as she said, some spiritual fortification, she expressed exactly my own need, and diagnosed, more perfectly than I could ever have done, my own spiritual malady, I could not tell her so. Her very beginning precluded that. And I knew, from the mere fact of her bringing herself to speak at all, the extremity of her case.

She had come to me, she said, not as to a brother, not even, for matter of that, as to a friend, but because—and these were her own words—I was the one person she knew who had managed, through those two years of chaos, to hold true to my orbit; because I had reached, apparently, within myself, some conclusion sufficient at least to enable me to

go on with my work as if the painting of pictures still mattered to the world; as if more than that, it still mattered to me.

She went on, to my amazement, to say other things in which I sought and presently found a clue. It was something about my having kept on my old studio. I saw then what had never occurred to me before; the mere outward and visible facts of my existence had, I suppose, presented the appearance of swinging along quite steadily and calmly in the old orbit. Of those inner, those deeper deflections, which no one had escaped, I can only say that they had taken place underneath in a way to make almost an explanation of the exterior calm. They had flung so far and so violently away from their orbit as to leave the exterior shell of existence still going round on its old momentum.

And because I had not escaped, I understood well the implication of Monica's half-humorous, half-rueful smile, when she asked, turning away from the window where she had stood looking out, if I remembered our attitude in the beginning. I laughed, and she with me, recalling what seemed now our colossal impertinence. For I think we actually saw the war, in those first days, as a kind of heroic new background for Art!

If not exactly for Art, at least for Life. By "we" I mean those of us—painters, writers, musicians—who had until then made up our own pleasant but, alas! unstable little world. I believe we rather prided ourselves upon being neither so hypocritical nor so romantic as to deceive ourselves about our attitude; about our reason for wishing to stay on where we were. It had been Monica's own phrase that she wanted the "feel" of Paris during the war. Well, it was what we all wanted, and what, in a very short time, we found had engulfed us—the strange, deadly stagnation, the impotence, the fading out of individuality, the futility, so far as one's own work was concerned, of carrying on.

And in the end most of us, one by one, sometime that first year, had gone home to America. And most of us, one by one, had come back again, drawn irresistibly by the belief that here, at least, we could touch the hem of the garment of Reality. But the hem of the garment tore in our hands, and Reality was not there. She was yonder, out of sight, lost in noise and that incredible orgy of blood. And nowhere else on the face of the earth was Reality to be found.

There were days, weeks almost, when Paris itself, the *belle ville*, so full of light and of



color, seemed a phantom city, and only when we passed in the street a uniformed figure on crutches, with bandaged head or empty pinned-up sleeve, did we seem to have encountered a traveler from the world. And the look in their faces bore us out—a look as of men strayed into unreality, and impatient to return again to the place whence they had come. Now and then a woman in stiff new crepe, with the tragedy of personal grief looking out of her eyes, would seem, for a moment, to completely materialize out of that city of ghosts.

Even those opinions which had formed themselves so clearly in the beginning had suffered the same disintegration, crushed under the weight of too much corroboration brought so passionately forth by all those compatriots of ours who, that first year, with the fierce partizanship of neutrals, hurled wordy certainties into the cause of the Allies. Like criminals promised immunity and carried away by the popularity of their own confessions, seeking to show themselves in the most ignominious rôle, to prove America the arch-criminal of the age. Until we who believed in our country, if a little blindly, yet truly, instinctively, as one believes in a mother, had begun to question how much of

their confession was true; how much, if the immunity were withdrawn, they would be willing to expiate. And so, doubting the depth of their sincerity, one also doubted one's own. One no longer had any opinions; no longer argued; no longer knew what to believe.

For if they who were in it were finding that third year hard to bear, we, who were out of it, were finding it hard in a different sort of way. For those with commands to give, there was the vitalizing weight of their responsibility; and for those who obeyed, the compensation of their obedience. But for us, whose realities had been colors, abstractions, harmonies, there was nothing. All our commands from those high Ideals by which we had believed ourselves officered had ceased. Or perhaps the Ideals had put on, for some stratagem of their own, new guises, and spoke their commands in strange voices which we were not able, as yet, to recognize.

One thing only we knew. The world no longer needed the work of our hearts and hands; we ourselves no longer believed in its worth.

## CHAPTER II

**L**ISTENING to her that day, I began to see that, of all of us, poor Monica West had reached, somehow, the lowest ebb. I say "poor Monica" with a sense of indulging myself, for until those days there had been no occasion upon which it would have been possible to speak or think of her in that way. Not that she had been the kind of person one speaks of as particularly self-sufficient, but she had seemed always to have within herself those fertile qualities of personality in which life grows continually, yielding naturally, wholesomely, richly, not in wealth or position or fame—though there was, if she kept on, the chance of the last—but in other things less namable and more evident.

It was strange to see her as she was to-day, her spirit dimmed and static; her will, she said, with a little gesture of giving up, hopelessly locked. And it was not alone her spirit which seemed to have lost its luster. For it seemed to me that even her hair, black

as ever and brushed as smoothly back from her brow, and the really fine gray eyes, which had given to Monica's coloring its curious depth and warmth, had somehow lost luster, had, with her spirit, lessened and dimmed and failed. Her voice alone remained the one vivid and expressive thing about her, only a shade more peculiarly vibrant than of old.

"I think," she said, ending a little pause after the statement of her case, "if I hadn't gone home in the beginning I should go now."

"And come back again next week!"

"Certainly. I know perfectly well it wouldn't do the least good. I'm only regretting I *do* know! Wishing I hadn't exhausted my cures when I needed them so much less than I do now. Don't you see?"

I did see, and I saw other things, too. She had given up her studio the first year and gone home; she had come back again, tried the studio, gone from there to a *pension*—"for company," she said—and from there to a small hotel, and now she was back at the *pension* again, because, she explained, it seemed, bad as it was, a little more human; it had "at least the homelike qualities of permanency and friction."

I recalled then a thing of which one was

very seldom reminded with Monica—that she was, in the matter of family connections, singularly isolated and detached. She had, I knew—had known since a certain casual conversation long ago in which she happened to tell me—no living relatives. And yet, as I say, I had had almost no occasion to recall it from that day to this. The staunchness of the friendships she inspired, I suppose, clouded the fact. And then Monica had always been so ardent an American that I think perhaps we had, in spite of our knowledge, a kind of subconscious impression, an involuntary picture, of family ties binding her heart to the land of her birth; of allegiance to some particular well-loved spot, an old home where life still flowed serenely and pleasantly on, waiting for her to return. But I know now that personal ties were the least part of her Americanism. It was something inherent and racial, as if she felt herself daughter of the land itself, sharer of its faults and inheritor of its future destiny. She said one day, I remember, that she loved America, but that she had “fallen in love” with France, and so long as France responded so gallantly she would stay, for there was always danger that one might fall out of love, but none whatever of ceasing to care for America.

And perhaps love of one's country and friends, of places and work and things, will suffice in less stressful days; had sufficed for Monica, as well as for hundreds of others. But in those latter days, when every human relationship was endangered, we cherished them more and drew them closer about us.

And Monica had none to cherish. It seemed suddenly to have left her rather pitifully alone; though she herself had, I feel sure, never seen it at all in that light. There was no self-pity in her attitude. She had come to me, she made it perfectly plain, not for sympathy, but for help. And she begged me, if I had any cloak whatever of sanity or philosophy, to let her borrow it. So, asked for a garment I did not possess, but not daring, for the sake of the friend who had need of it, to confess my lack, I turned despairingly to search my meager wardrobe, and found, to my amazement, hung away in its depths, sundry worn old mantles, discarded and forgotten long ago, but which proved to have retained, if not their style, at least much of their original warmth. I was as grateful for them as Monica, and grateful to her as well for having caused me the search.

She said, at last, that of course she was thinking too much about herself. I said that

was nonsense, and that precisely the opposite was true; that it was a peculiarity of conscientious natures like hers to believe they were too much interested in themselves, when, as a matter of fact, they weren't interested enough; they ran out to abstractions; they thought of everything in the world *but* themselves.

She looked at me sidewise a moment, and then began slowly to smile, exactly as if she said, "That's a quaint, ingenious little wrap you've offered, but you know very well it doesn't fit me."

Nevertheless, she let it, for the sake of the argument, remain about her shoulders.

"Well," she said, "if I'm interested in other things besides myself, I do very little about them."

"Do? Why, you're at work all the time, with your pneumonia jackets twice a week, your mornings at the canteen—"

She interrupted me with, "Oh, those things! Everybody does *them*. They're the fashion—just as we used to walk in the *Bois*."

"Well," I said, "don't run down a good thing just because it happens to be fashionable; even walking in the *Bois*, you know, was a very good thing."

"Oh, to be sure!" she said, and, "Of

course!" as if she hadn't meant to imply anything whatever against them, but had merely wished to relegate them to the place in the conversation which they occupied in her own consideration.

"You see, Gilbert," she said, after I had by my readjustment of attention accepted her apology, "those are things we do with our hands; and it's the other things—decisions we're called on to make—"

I felt she was trying to formulate some problem which had stood but vaguely in the background of her own consciousness, but she brought out her next statement with a definiteness which took me off my feet.

"If," she said, "I could only make up my mind whether, if I were a man, I should go to the front and fight; but I'm no longer sure even of that. I'm no longer sure of anything!"

I don't know why I was so much astonished, except that it had never occurred to me that there might be women, as well as men, who had been unable to escape those fine-drawn considerations which beset one at every turn to say where one stood. I knew better than to suggest to Monica that she might rest such questions upon our government's proclamation of neutrality; for she, no more than I,



had been able to let that conclude her own moral deliberations. Yet I managed somehow to change my astonishment into a laugh, and to say, injecting an inference of absurdity into my tone: "You *would* harass yourself about that!"

"And why not?" she asked. "I'd be shirking the whole thing if I didn't settle that."

"Do you imagine many women are troubling their heads about what they would do if they were men?"

"Don't you think they are?"

"I've never heard one say so before."

"I suppose," she said, "that *I've* never *said* so before!"

It was in this connection that I happened to say the thing which proved in the end to be the cloak which seemed to give her most warmth. At any rate, it was the one under whose shelter she went forth courageously again to brave the weather.

It was in response, a little tardy perhaps, but none the less obvious and direct, to what she had just been saying.

"I should think," I said, "that it's much more important to decide whether, since you're a painter, you're going to paint."

I knew by her expression that it had given her the right-about-face she had wished for.

Her laugh a moment later sounded like the old Monica, seeing suddenly, as she had always been able to see before, the humorous side of her own performance.

"I've known all the time that I was ridiculous," she said, "but I had to have some one else point it out!"

I said that she hadn't been ridiculous, but that it was only common sense for each one of us to stick to his job until we could see something better to do.

She said she knew that perfectly well, but that it should be plain to me that she hadn't been acting upon anything so reasonable as common sense.

She went very soon after that, declaring that I had done her a tremendous amount of good, and that she was going home and work. She even said that she had just that moment an idea for the finishing of a picture she had begun months before and abandoned when it was half sketched in. She promised to come again and talk things out if she needed it.

When she was gone I actually set to work myself. For if the talk had done her good, it had done me more. I felt that if I could find some poor soul more chaotic than myself, I should, out of charity, go to him and

say the things Monica had said to me, confess my own chaos and weakness, prefacing my confession as Monica had prefaced hers. There seemed almost the chance that if we should all throw ourselves upon the strength of one another, we should build up an impregnable fortification, since we should have to summon and array all the logic at our command for that other who had confessed the greater need.

We had, as it was inevitable that we should, many such talks after that, during which, also inevitably, we were drawn much closer together than all the years we had known each other had brought us. And I, for my part, had a growing sense of responsibility for what I may call her spiritual welfare.

And here, because the story I have to tell is, secondarily at least, her story, let me make plain—and it is very simple—the quality of the relationship between Monica West and myself.

Whatever the chemistry of love may be, it did not then, and never has, existed between us. Yet my feeling for her had in it tenderness, concern for her happiness and her good, and the potentiality of sacrifice for her sake; a feeling which we hesitate, for fear of the scoffers, to claim. For in these days we

have come to be over-familiar with love, and afraid of the very name of friendship. And it was friendship of the warmest and most precious kind that existed between Monica West and myself.

## CHAPTER III

**I** HAVE said that this is only secondarily Monica West's story, and that is true. The story belongs primarily to Allan Gregg. Without him there would have been nothing to tell. Nothing, that is, which might not have been told by any outsider. And Fate seemed to have placed me from the very beginning peculiarly on the inside.

I had met Allan Gregg several years before—in 1911, I think it was—at Bert Perryman's house in New York; and the briefness of our acquaintance gave it in retrospect the effect of a prologue to the real story now about to begin. In it his character was set and my interest piqued. So that on the Friday afternoon when I received his note saying that he had arrived in Paris three days earlier, and inclosing a note from Perryman, I called up the number he gave me at once, and had from the moment he came to the telephone a startlingly sudden return of all those impressions and interests which he had

evoked during our first short acquaintance-ship, and which had made him for me so distinct a personality. Yet distinct is hardly the word. It is, as a matter of fact, not the word at all. I shall try to explain.

I recall even now, after this lapse of time and all that has come in between to obliterate it, the impression I had of him in the very first moment of our meeting.

I had dropped in to see Perryman in his Sixty-fourth Street place one evening about nine, and had found several people there before me. Martin Craft was there, and George Purcell, smoking and talking; and, a little apart from the others, in Perryman's old tapestry armchair, a frail-looking young man in gray, with a particularly vivid tie which accentuated his own lack of color, sat reading a book.

His hands, as he closed the book, keeping his place with a finger laid lightly between the leaves, were noticeably well shaped and delicate; his feet, outstretched before him in an attitude of ease, were rather too narrow for a man's. The hands and feet portrait-painters are so fond of giving to young aristocrats. Simultaneously, almost preceding these visual impressions, I had from him another and even stronger one—the impression of an ex-

treme reticence—a puzzling reticence which led me to conjecture in what proportion it was made up of shyness and what proportion of unusual poise.

But whatever the proportions were, they remained even more puzzlingly the same when, a moment later, the familiar greetings of the others over, he rose to acknowledge Perryman's introduction. His handshake was cool and firm, and I remember thinking again how gentle a hand it was for a man.

I was somehow totally unprepared for the special charm of his smile. It began in his eyes, which one discovered to be gray-blue and a little tired, as if he had passed through illness, and lighted quickly his whole face—a spontaneous, shy boy's smile, receding slowly until it rested again in his eyes. If he repeated my name, his voice was lost in my repetition of his. I had only the curious quality of his reserve, the merest echo of a quiet voice, and the smile, yet I felt myself in that moment mysteriously enlisted upon his side.

I can explain it in no other way; and I was not, I came later to know, the first man who had been so enlisted. What the "other" side might be I had no idea; but if I had been put to it to answer, I think I should have said

that it was simply Life itself against which he contended. I had not for an instant the sense of his having any active, tangible foe against which my help could prevail. There was, instead, the sense of his not having been able to challenge the adversary to open fair combat; of the enemy being not flesh and blood, but an entity of circumstance, environment—fate. And none of the obvious weapons had been used against him. He had every evidence of material prosperity, and I have never seen a man who carried with him so infinite an air of leisure.

He had reached New York only that day, from Duluth, Perryman said, where he lived. It surprised me to hear this, because, I suppose, he seemed so little the Western type. To be sure, all kinds of men make the West, as they do the East, but we New-Yorkers had learned to expect a particular kind. And Gregg was not that kind. Unless, perhaps, his voice, quiet and unhurried and low, with the slightest possible hesitancy now and then, as if deprecating a little in advance what he was going to say, may have suggested the Western drawl. But in Gregg it seemed only to follow the pattern of his personality, and to reflect again the reticent charm of his smile.



The talk, though I remember few of the things we actually said, was of everything under the sun—sketchy and erratic as it was likely to be when Craft and Purcell and Perryman were about.

Allan Gregg spoke seldom, but listened, lying back at ease in the big tapestry chair, the book he had been reading open across his knee, and drawing at a straight-stemmed brier pipe, tamping the fading coals now and then lightly with the tip of his forefinger. Indeed, I think he hardly spoke at all except when Perryman or some one of us made a special effort to draw him into the conversation. I have known men who said as little and appeared to have said more, but I have never known a man who said so little and appeared to have left so much unsaid.

How much my estimate was swayed or my interest heightened by Perryman's frank expression of admiration for Allan Gregg I cannot say. Perhaps I should have been interested in any one who was responsible for such an expression, for Perryman was a man of few and reluctant friendships. But this I do know: that in the first hour of my acquaintance with him I had felt more things about young Gregg than I had ever felt about those other three put together. And I had

known them all for years. But the things I knew about them were no stronger than what I may call my intuitions about Allan Gregg. And these intuitions grew not so much from tangible hints or suggestions as from what seemed to me his almost painful suppressions.

Out of that night's conversation, two things only remain clearly in my memory; and those two remain, I suppose, only because of the subsequent significance they came to have in my mind, and the light they shed even then upon the personality of Allan Gregg.

The first came about in this way: Perryman, during a lull in the talk, turned to me suddenly and asked, "By the way, do you know where there are any etchings of the down-town sky-line—from the Jersey side?"

I said I thought they could be had at Keppel's—that several people had done them.

"With the mist?" asked Allan Gregg, making, as he spoke, a swift floating gesture with his slender hand.

"The mist?" I said, not understanding exactly what he meant. And Perryman answered for him, as he did more than once that night.

"Gregg wants to find one as he saw it this morning, coming in, with the early mist."

I had seen it often, and knew what wonder he meant.

"Your first sight of it?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, then added, "I've never happened to come into New York that way before."

"It's worth looking at," said Purcell.

Gregg made no comment, just waited a moment, and then said, "I want an etching of it, if there's one to be had."

If he had left his praises unspoken, they were plain enough, to be sure, in his conclusion. It would have been in another man the most refreshing kind of directness. But in Allan Gregg it became instead, for us all, a directness which was almost pathetic, and certainly quite the reverse of refreshing. For one had an immediate impression of his having wished intensely to say something more, to express the fullness of his admiration; to voice, as other men do, his enthusiasm for so beautiful a thing.

I say it had become so for us all, for the others as well as myself, and my reason for believing this lies in the fact that our reactions were exactly alike. For a moment later we found ourselves launched upon an exchange of the most ardent attempts to recapture and put into words those elusive

sensations with which each of us had responded to his first similar sight of that skyline. An exchange which ordinarily would have held for us, who knew one another so well, more than one element of absurdity; but which seemed now imbued with so strong a sense of some ulterior motive that it must have been apparent to all of us, in varying degrees and interpretations, what that motive was. It was as if we sought, by giving thus freely of our own expression, to accomplish for Allan Gregg some vicarious satisfaction, to fulfil for him some imperative need which he himself was powerless to fulfil.

How far we succeeded we had no means of knowing. Once, in response to some fairly direct allusion of Purcell's, he said, the beginning of his rare smile lighting his eyes, "Yes, it really is beautiful," and seemed again to have arrived abruptly and unintentionally at his conclusion, leaving unsaid the things he had wished to say.

All this, I afterward found, was not at all an unusual occurrence when Gregg was present. People were always trying to express things for him, and he accepted these good offices silently, held, it seemed, by whatever power had prevented his own expression in the beginning from making any acknowledgment.

I have since seen other men, naturally untalkative, undemonstrative men, inspired to the most sincere and poetic expression in the presence of Allan Gregg.

Perryman told me, a week or two later, that Gregg had spent the whole of several afternoons in search of his etching, and had finally selected and bought the best of the lot, which pleased him only moderately, but that he was still on the lookout for a better one. I recall this particularly because he spoke to me of it one day in France, in the midst of so much greater absorptions that any one except Gregg would have forgotten so trifling a thing.

There was in the one other incident I remember out of that conversation the same leap from premise to abrupt conclusion. The subject of the 1911 Moroccan incident, the Agadir affair, which had occupied the front-page head-lines that day, had just come up, and some one had asked Gregg's opinion as to the outcome. And he said that the outcome of the whole situation would be a war in which all Europe would be involved within five years. Not, of course, so remarkable a statement, since one had begun to hear it with more or less frequency wherever men of affairs were gathered together. I merely

record it as indicative of one of the salient points of his character—the somehow unexpected lucidity and detachment of his mental processes. He watched the handwriting upon the wall through no such beautiful haze of sentimentality as blurred the vision of the rest of us there. And yet, unforgivable as that sentimentality was, sinful even as it has proved itself, I cannot help being glad that there was a time when I believed, however foolishly, in the impossibility of this thing which has come to pass.

## CHAPTER IV

I HAD from Perryman that same night corroboration of my strongest intuitions about Allan Gregg. We all left at the same time, Purcell and Craft and Gregg going, as it happened, in the same direction; and Perryman, getting his hat and coat, said he would walk down the Avenue with me. On the way he talked about Gregg. I suppose he knew I was interested.

He began by saying that he had always liked young Gregg tremendously, and that he had always been sorry for him; that he seemed always to have had the worst end of things. I asked in what way, and Perryman said that it was hard to say, exactly; and then, as if to infer that I might draw for myself from the facts, he went on to tell me something of Gregg's life.

They had met, it appeared, at college somewhere in the Middle West. And although Perryman was older and they had few classes in common, they had seen a great deal of

each other. Perryman had, he said, been immediately attracted to Gregg, "and I suppose he liked me," he added, "though I should never have known it by anything he said. He merely showed his preference by coming to see me more often than he did the other fellows—sitting about in my quarters as if he were more comfortable there than anywhere else. I think he felt that I understood how difficult it was for him to talk, to express himself in any way."

Gregg was a special student, taking only those things in which he was particularly interested—history, mostly, and Greek art, and philosophy—not at all with any definite aim or fitting himself for business or a profession. He was interested in the study of certain subjects; that was enough. And why not? It would never be necessary for him to work, since he was the only son of old Bolder Gregg, one of the four or five rich lumbermen of Duluth.

"It's easy enough to see," said Perryman, "why Duluth called him dilettante and a snob."

In Perryman's mention of Duluth, a curious indignation seemed still alive against the town. He had gone home with Gregg over the Easter holidays, and he gave me, if not



a careful, at least a sufficiently vivid, picture of the home in which Allan Gregg had spent his childhood.

"A big three-story house—upholstered—upholstered—upholstered!" said Perryman, making with each repetition of the word a sweeping horizontal gesture, one above the other, which gave an impression of three entire floors of upholstery. "Good things, you know—not old. Expensive rugs, silk lamps . . . terra-cotta, brown . . . *comfortable!*" He said "comfortable" as if it were of all qualities the one most to be shunned in a house. "And the house itself, painted brown, and upholstered in a whole block of trees! And the mother, upholstered in brown silk. And the father, upholstered in iron-gray hair and a big iron-gray mustache."

He told them off, these different items, accusingly, as if he were making so many counts against Fate for having ordained poor Allan Gregg to such surroundings.

"And the dinners!" he appended, remembering suddenly one of the most important items of the list, "upholstered, too!"

Here he seemed abruptly to think he had overpainted the picture.

"But nice people," he said, "*fine* people. Best hearts in the world. And of course

they'd done everything for the boy . . . except understand him."

He fell as abruptly again into his tone of almost indignant accusation. And having struck by chance upon the word which described every item better, apparently, than any other word could have done, he used it again. "They'd even upholstered their emotions. They were at the stage—not exactly *nouveaux riches*, just good pioneer stock gone wrong—when their idea of culture was never to show a single human emotion. No wonder the boy was suppressed! They were too up-to-date to have any despotic religious or even moral views against which the boy could have exercised his rebellion. I don't believe they'd ever in all their lives given him one natural spontaneous moment of affection, or anger, or enthusiasm, or anything human!"

It was really pathetic to see them together, those three. The heavy, dull old pair, whose inarticulate desire for something other than themselves, for the elegances and refinements of life, had resulted in this boy, this fine flower of their dreams. They were proud of him, yet a little puzzled by his easy familiarity with all those phases of life which were still new and alien to them.

But there was never anything in young Gregg's manner to hint that he thought them other than the real thing. He talked politics and the day's news with his father, and showed his mother the most perfect and beautiful deference.

"Naturally," Perryman said, "he was the real thing, and any other course would have been impossible for him."

They had spent as much time as they could without being conspicuously absent, in Gregg's own room, where his individual taste struggled and miraculously survived against the good offices of his mother's attention.

It was a big square room on the second floor, and there were books, and free window spaces looking out on a garden that was specially his. And there were pictures, hung with a fine instinct for spacing—two charming small landscapes on one wall, an excellent black-and-white of Barre's, and over the mantel an arrestingly beautiful water-color, the work of a modern Scandinavian. On a carved base in a corner stood a great urn of ancient bronze Damascene. On his desk a photograph of his mother in furs, in an ornate gilt frame, her gift, occupied the place of honor. And this room, like its owner, gave an impression of having its chief treas-

ures beneath the surface, hidden away out of sight.

Two long presses were built into the wall at one end, and opposite a deep closet with a curtain of Chinese brocade.

Perryman had expressed his great admiration for the picture above the mantel, whereupon Gregg, standing beside him, remarked that he "had others of his," and, going across to one of the presses, he opened it and took out a portfolio which contained, to Perryman's astonishment, three more unframed water-colors by the same artist—exquisite things in the same manner. He explained merely that he had "liked them," but thought one enough in a room. Perryman declared that he could never have resisted having them where he could see them. At any rate, he said, he might have taken one along for his sitting-room at college. Upon his suggesting this, Gregg replied that he "hadn't thought of it." "Would you?" he asked, a moment later, and laid one aside with the remark that he "supposed he might as well."

In another portfolio, which he came upon while he was putting the water-colors away, were three tiny dry points of Haskell's, those infinitesimally delicate landscapes whose beauty forced from Perryman an involuntary

protest against their being hidden away. And to this Gregg replied that they were "lost on a wall," and there was no place else to keep them where they would be out of the dust.

"Extraordinary," said Perryman, reminiscently, as if recalling his emotion of that time, "a man with such feeling for beautiful things, and unable to give it any expression whatever, except buying them. I sometimes think it would have been better if he had had to slave for them, go without other things—that might have given him *something*."

In the same way, he said, he had one day admired the bronze Damascene urn in the corner of the room, and Gregg said, yes, it was a very good example, and old; he had got it in Japan, very cheap, a bargain. And he asked whether Perryman was interested in Damascene. Upon his answer that he was very much indeed, Gregg departed behind the curtain of Chinese brocade, returning a moment later with three small pieces of beautifully wrought modern Damascene—an ink-box, in the design of an ancient chest, a paper-cutter, like a miniature sword with an elaborate hilt, and a round ash-tray fashioned like an inverted shield,

decorated inside and out, the arm clasps on either side to be used as cigarette rests. His own idea, he said, in answer to Perryman's question, and the designs for all three pieces were his own. And they were, Perryman said, marvelously conceived in the Japanese spirit. He had had them made in Kioto, interrupting his journey twice to return and see how they were progressing in the four months required for their completion.

It had occurred then to Perryman that there was something Japanese in the way Gregg had brought them out from their closet and passed them straightway over to him with an almost Oriental coolness and detachment from the thing he had been at so much pains to acquire; and the way in which he watched with manifest satisfaction, but no comment whatever, Perryman's enthusiastic appreciation as he turned the pieces about under the light; and when Perryman had done admiring them there was the same aloofness in the way he replaced them, without an added glance, in their closet behind the curtain of Chinese brocade.

There had been something even more obviously Japanese in his choosing to hang the single water-color when he had others as beautiful. He had made the trip to the

Orient while he was still in his teens, and Perryman suggested to him that Japan had influenced his taste. He considered it fairly, Perryman said, and then seemed to decide against it, saying that he had "always liked pretty much the same things."

All this, the house in Duluth, reflecting so clearly the lives and temperaments of its owners—all this is vivid to me now because, I suppose, it was so vivid to Perryman, and he had been able to make me see through his eyes. And the picture came to me without any of those qualifying incidents and details which must assuredly have been present at the time to destroy its unity. Perryman was able to paint it for me as he chose, bringing out his colors in the proportions into which they had finally fallen for him.

## CHAPTER V

I SAW Gregg several times after that, at Perryman's house, and by appointment when we went about together to places he wished to see, and to which Perryman told him I should be the best guide. And my interest held as it had begun—and my allegiance as well.

Two weeks later he returned to Duluth, and the following month I sailed for France.

Several years went by before I heard anything further of Allan Gregg; yet he remained with rather unusual persistence in my memory.

It must have been in the latter part of 1914, in Paris, that there came to me one of Perryman's long-delayed, spasmodic letters, in the course of which he wrote:

. . . You remember young Gregg. He's been here in New York for two weeks, on some sort of business, he says, for his father. But I think the business is only a pretext to get away from Duluth for a while. I don't blame him, poor devil! It must be worse than ever for him now. But you've never heard



of his marriage. I've meant several times to tell you, but forgot it when I was writing. It happened the year you met him here in New York. She appears to have been a pretty, scatter-brained kind of creature, the daughter of another one of Duluth's rich fathers. It was considered a good match, I believe, by both families. Don't ask me how it came about. I don't know. I doubt whether he knows himself. I saw her once, when Gregg brought her to New York. I knew no more then. You can imagine they hadn't much in common. Well, the next year their baby was born. I had hoped that the child was going to be the thing—the turning-point, you know, for Gregg. But the year after that the wife suddenly created a beautiful scandal by eloping with another man. Some impossible red-faced promoter, out there on a more or less shady big money deal. She took the child. She'd been a bit wild, it seems, from the first. Poor Gregg said nothing, did nothing; just waited a decent length of time, and then brought suit for divorce, on the ground of desertion. . . . Of course he never talks of it. If I didn't *know* what it must mean to him, I'd say it hadn't moved him at all. Yesterday a kodak snap-shot of the baby dropped out of his bill-folder by accident, and he showed it to me. Seemed to think he had to; but he was horribly embarrassed. It's a curse, a nature like that!

I wish he'd chuck Duluth and the whole thing; strike out for himself. Something, God knows what, seems to hold him. He said the other day that his father and mother were getting pretty well along. Maybe that's it. Well, something's got to happen for him *some day*. Meantime, I wish he'd complain,

rebel, swear, get into a rage! It would do *me*, at least, a great deal of good; and there's no telling what it might do for him. . . .

Allan Gregg married! My efforts to imagine it failed utterly. The whole thing presented itself in the light of another *coup* of that stifling negative Fate which seemed to pursue him. I say "another" because I thought of it in that way at that time. Yet I had known of no other such "*coup*," or of anything which might have been likened to one. But it is just this intensity, this, as a matter of fact, exaggerated reaction to the misfortune of Allan Gregg, that I wish to record. I found myself blaming that three-storied upholstered house, blaming his father and mother, blaming Duluth. I was unable all that day to banish him from my thoughts. And that night I tried telling a friend about him, and failed.

I asked Perryman about him several times when I wrote, but his only response was to say that he had gone back to Duluth. There was, I suppose, nothing further to tell.

## CHAPTER VI

**T**HAT, then, was all I knew of Gregg until the day, almost two years later, in the early autumn of 1916, when I received his note saying that he was in Paris, and inclosing a short letter from Perryman.

The whole world had turned upside down since then, and my memory of him had been buried, along with all other memories of that time, under the terrible reality of the war. Values had reversed themselves; emotions failed to respond to the old stimuli. So that, when I called up the number he gave, it was startling to have so sudden and complete a return of all those impressions and interests evoked so long ago, with the very first sound of his voice on the telephone. It was as if, having long ago enlisted myself upon his side—so long I had almost forgotten it—I had been suddenly called to the colors.

His note had told me nothing of why he had come, and my first question was, naturally, to ask what had brought him to France.

It would seem that I might have been at least somewhat prepared for his answer, but I was not. I had, in fact, to wait a few seconds to recover after he gave it.

"American Ambulance," he said.

The curious thing was that I hadn't once connected him in any way with the war, yet there were almost no Americans coming to France then without that connection, and no one at all was coming merely for pleasure.

But for Allan Gregg—and yet why not he as well as any one of those four or five young fellows of my acquaintance who were driving their ambulances about Paris?

"You'll be stationed at Neuilly, then," I said, and again I was unprepared for his reply.

"No," he said, "field service, at the front."

His voice was the same, calm and low and unhurried, yet I had from it now—or perhaps it was from something within myself—an overtone of something not in his voice before, some enthusiasm emerging, despite his reticence, and trying to make itself heard.

I could only repeat after him, "The front?" as if I had not properly understood.

"Yes," he said, "the front," and I thought he enjoyed a little my too evident surprise—a surprise which had more in it than the news

itself might ordinarily have involved. I was remembering his frailty, his delicate hands, and his narrow feet. And remembering, too, the tired look in his eyes, as if he had passed through illness.

Involuntarily I asked if he had had his physical examinations, to which he replied, "Oh yes, before I came over," in the tone of one to whom physical examinations presented no difficulty whatever.

"And when do you go?" I asked.

He said he was to go out with the next unit, in about two weeks, he believed, though they were waiting for orders; and added, after a second's hesitation, that he had hoped to go out at once, without any delay.

It occurred to me then that I had said none of the things which one man might naturally expect another to say, and I tried then to make him feel some of the enthusiasm I had for his news. But I'm afraid I said only the conventional things and he made me the conventional responses. For if conversation with Allan Gregg presented certain difficulties at all times, it presented still more apparent ones over the telephone.

He promised to come and see me on Sunday afternoon, the first day he would be free; and I had an impression of the friendliness of

his smile accompanying his good-by at the other end of the wire.

When I left the telephone I took up Perryman's letter again. Nothing in it spoke directly of what Gregg had come to do. He said only, at the last, "I know it will interest you to hear of Gregg's intention."

Of course, Gregg himself had been the bearer of the letter. Perryman could have said little more. But I knew what he meant; I knew that he was recalling to me the things he had told me that night walking down the Avenue in New York—and this reference to Gregg's intention held a kind of enthusiastic note of applause, of jubilation over the fulfilment of his prophecy.

Next morning I had in the regular post a second letter from Perryman, sent by the same steamer on which Gregg had crossed, but delayed those few days by the censor.

"I gave Gregg a letter this morning to deliver to you," he wrote:

... but I can't resist writing another word or two to send privately by the same steamer. At last, by Jove! it's come—the thing he's been waiting for all his life — his great opportunity. Opportunity for what exactly I don't know, and I don't think he knows, except that the miracle is about to be worked. You know I've always believed it would be, in some

kind of way, but of course I hadn't pictured ever anything so—well, so heroic as this. I tell you he gave me a thrill when he walked in the other day (I hadn't heard from him for months) and said he was going. A man's ideals don't need any better expression than he's going to give his over there. Words aren't the only eloquent things.

I hope you'll show him about a bit if he has any time. He liked you. Told me so when I gave him the letter. And some day we're going to be proud, you and I, old man, to have had Gregg for a friend.

This must go now or it won't catch the steamer. You've forgotten, I suppose, that you owe me a letter. These two make it three. Write me the news of Gregg, when you've seen him.

Yours,

PERRYMAN

Reading this letter, I found myself beginning to wonder what effect it would have upon Allan Gregg if he knew the extent of the faith he had inspired in Perryman. And I was glad, for his sake, to feel that he didn't know.

## CHAPTER VII

OTHER people were coming on Sunday, so that I was glad when Gregg arrived early.

I heard him coming up the stairs, pursued by the voice of the *concierge* calling, "*Le troisième! Troisième!*" as if a stop at the wrong floor would surely prove fatal.

Just what change I had expected to see in him I hardly know. But no amount of change could have given me any more start than the way in which he had managed to remain *unchanged*.

He came in with his hat in his hand, and the smile beginning in his eyes lighted his face quickly, and again his greeting was lost in mine. He wore the same shade of gray he had worn that first night in New York, and his tie struck the same single brilliant note.

To be sure, it was natural enough that a preference like that should endure in the matter of dress. I myself have worn the same general color for years. And more



mobile faces than Allan Gregg's have failed to reflect much greater changes than had taken place in him. But in that first moment of adjustment to his being so exactly the same, I realized that it would be by no such outward sign that one would become aware of the changes in Allan Gregg.

I think the cordiality of my welcome pleased him and put him at ease, for he answered, more freely than I had known him to do before, all my questions about New York and about Perryman, whom he had stayed over a few days to see.

He left it for me to speak of the purpose of his coming, and I referred to it naturally almost at once, asking how he had come to decide upon it.

"I wanted to come," he said, "and driving a car is the only useful thing I know how to do."

There it was — premise and conclusion. None of the stages that went between; no talk of wanting to "do his bit," nothing about ideals, no scorn of our own neutrality, no heroics!

The mere fact of his coming covered all that. Spoke eloquently enough of his belief in the righteousness of the cause to which he had pledged himself.

I was reminded suddenly of the curtain of Chinese brocade Perryman had told me about, and I wondered what treasured ideals, what enthusiasms, what ardors, lay hidden now behind the curtain of his reserve.

Whatever qualms I had felt about his ability to go through with it fled now before my certainty that Allan Gregg knew what he was about. He had considered well before he had made his decision. His spirit was equal to it; of that I could have no doubt. Only his physical resistance remained to be put to the test. And here I remembered what Perryman had said of Gregg's father and mother—that they were "pioneer stock." It was that which showed itself now in the son. It was that blood which nourished the roots of his calm self-reliance.

He had walked over to the window and stood looking down into my little court, with its battered stone statue of a lady in the middle, disporting herself amid waters visible only to her memory.

"It's going to be a tremendous experience," I said, and he waited a moment before he answered, seeming to cover some almost emotional response. Then, "I suppose so," he said, and stopped as if he had wished to say more, but could not.

Into the pause which followed came the sound of steps on the stairs, and Sturgis, the translator, and Alice Germaine were at the door.

I introduced them to Gregg, and added that he had just arrived by the last boat, and at once they asked the usual question as to whether he hadn't been nervous about submarines. To which he replied in his quiet, diffident voice that if you took into account the proportion of actual attacks upon steamers, and after that the chances in favor of being rescued in case of attack, the risk was practically nothing. So, having made that calculation, he had thought no more about it, had put it out of his mind.

"Oh, well," cried Alice Germaine, "if you can!"

And here there were more steps on the stairs, and more voices, and Gregg gave Alice Germaine, whose ejaculation had been just a bit argumentative, his sudden, shy boy's smile, which seemed hurriedly to say that she at least was an older acquaintance than these strangers who were now coming in. Her response was to take upon herself part of the introductions.

But Gregg retreated further before each new arrival—retreated into himself—so that

presently, when the room had begun to hum with their talk, he had isolated himself in their midst, at a table, looking over some sketches I had been using that morning. Seeing him thus engaged, and knowing how abundantly able the rest of them were to care for themselves, I went over to him. He looked up from where he was sitting, absorbed and simply at ease, and asked me some question concerning the sketches.

I had just finished my answer and turned to look for another sketch to illustrate my point, when across the room the door opened and Monica West came in, and, catching my eye over the heads of the others, she made a little gesture of greeting which seemed to say that she hadn't expected to see so many people, and that she wished to slip in, please, as if she had been there from the first.

Her glance, as it went round the room, taking in all those familiar faces in variations of their familiar groupings, seemed, as Monica's glance was so often able to do, to bring them into focus for me. Then she slipped, with an expression of half-comic despair, into a chair near the door.

It was the same old thing — every single soul talking about the war! And so they were.

Sturgis, by the piano, was explaining to some one, with three matches and a lead-pencil laid out on his palm, some technical hypothesis of his own about the battle of the Marne, which he had never been able to make anybody understand.

On the window-seat big Pardee, like a man lost and wandering about in a wilderness of statistics, but determined to hew his way out, was talking to Mary Lynch, who kept stopping him to say: "Don't tell me dates! Just give me the facts!" and poor Pardee, looking as if he besought her not to interfere, for he would never get out if he couldn't use what implements he had at hand for his extrication.

Across the room, the nucleus of a shifting group, Reeve, the tall, ironic American publisher, and his small, ironic wife, who had evolved out of long habit a kind of conversational counterpoint, both of meaning and tone, which enabled them to talk at once with the utmost amiability, were telling the astonishing news they had brought over from London the week before, that there were people in England who still spoke of the United States with confidence and respect. Which news might have been treason, from the reluctance with which it was being received,

the exclamations of incredulity, and the shaking of unconvinced heads.

And moving about like the jester at this solemn court went Tommy O'Day, stopping just long enough to perpetrate his invariable idiotic joke of greeting any reference to the war with a sudden, really comic look of surprise and the question, "War? What war?" . . . Little Tommy O'Day—he was to come soon enough to know "what war" it was.

Monica's glance came round to me again, and it was then, by the movement of some one away from the intervening space, that she discovered Allan Gregg.

I saw her regard him curiously, and it may have been something in her expression which brought me the realization that she was seeing him for the first time in almost the exact position and circumstance in which I had first seen him that night in New York, and that I was playing for her the rôle Perryman had then played for me. And I was conscious of an absurd desire to interpret him; an anxiety that she should see in him all the things I had seen.

Leaning back in her chair, she continued to watch him, whether idly or with growing interest I could not tell. It occurred to me then that we three were the only people in

the room not talking war. Gregg was still engrossed in comparing the sketches, handing them up to me one by one with his slim, gentle hand.

I don't remember now the question with which Reeve brought Gregg so suddenly into the spot-light. It involved, evidently, something about the temper of the people at home, which had been under discussion, for he turned round rather abruptly to say:

"Mr. Gregg, I should think, would be qualified to give us an opinion on that," and then he asked his question.

There was a pause in which Gregg's reticence came out strongly before he replied.

"I think," he said, "that the people at home don't understand how it concerns them."

"Then you think," said Sturgis, breaking in, "that we should be in?"

"That," I hastened to say, answering for him, and again acting involuntarily Perryman's rôle, "is why he's here!"

Mary Lynch spoke then, fervently, leaning forward from her place in the window: "It's good to see one man who knows what he thinks, and is willing to go out and prove it!"

A silence filled with subtle rebuke spread round the room, seeming to isolate Gregg

even more sharply where he sat by his table, until that peculiar quality of his reticence became so apparent that there rose from several corners at once an almost simultaneous chorus of seconds to Mary Lynch's remark.

"When do you go out?" asked Reeve.

Gregg seemed to welcome a question so definite. "With the next unit—in about two weeks, I believe."

"Field ambulance?" asked Pardee, who had arrived too late for any but brief introductions.

"Field ambulance, yes."

"Pretty stiff work," said Pardee, making involuntarily the inference every one in that room had just made to himself, that Allan Gregg looked hardly the man for the kind of work that could be designated as "stiff."

It had the rather sudden effect of stemming the tide of their criticisms, of their easy statements of how things should be, and everywhere the talk took on a lighter, more personal tone.

Sturgis, discovering Monica, dropped down beside her and engaged her in conversation. But she was only half attentive, and kept, so to speak, an eye and an ear for Allan Gregg.



Perhaps it was some premonition of familiarity which gave so sharp an edge now to her interest. At least I construed it so the next instant, when Reeve, lifting his voice a little to be heard over the heads of several others, asked Gregg whether he lived in New York; and Gregg replied that his home was in Duluth, and that he had only stopped over a few days in New York before his steamer sailed.

It was the mention of Duluth, coupled with Monica's sudden turning of her head in our direction, which brought back a thing long gone out of my mind.

Monica had once lived in Duluth! I was sure she had told me that.

"Gregg," said I, "I wonder if you know Monica West?"

"Who?" he asked, laying down the last sketch and beginning to look about.

"Monica West, from Duluth."

He repeated the name after me—"West," but, delighted at the prospect of their knowing each other, I told him to come along, and led the way across the room to where Monica sat.

He followed, plainly puzzled; but before we reached Monica I saw that she had recognized him.

Yet they both waited for my introduction. If she knew him she had decided to give no sign.

"You must have played hide-and-seek together, you two," I said.

"I'm afraid not," said Monica, smiling at the surprise with which Gregg received her assurance that she really had grown up in Duluth.

"I thought I knew every one who'd ever lived there," he said. And the secret of Monica's smile was made plain to me later that night when she told me that she had thought there was something particularly nice in the way he shook hands because of Duluth, and something nicer still in his indifference to the fact that there were demarkations even in Duluth which might quite naturally account for the son of Bolder Gregg not knowing the niece of those two extraordinary old nobodies with whom Monica had made her home until she was sixteen.

Even when he asked where in town she had lived, and had recognized her description of the funny, ramshackle old house, he still seemed to think it queer that they had never met.

The first faint coolness with which she had received Gregg had faded out. She had put

it on deliberately upon our approach, as one puts on an armor of defense, but it had quite undeliberately disappeared under the simplicity of his friendliness and the charm of his smile.

For him at least Duluth had accomplished the preliminaries of acquaintance, and set them already upon the road to friendship. And I think it was also true for Monica. She had lacked such homely personal ties. And perhaps she had missed them more than she knew.

Gregg asked, in his unhurried, quiet voice, how long she had been away, and Monica said she had come away when she was sixteen, ages ago! and hadn't been back since. And he said the comfortable, obvious thing—that she wouldn't then know Duluth. And she began asking questions—whether the City Hall still needed a coat of paint, and if the elm-tree still stood in the middle of the sidewalk at K Street and Washington; if this was the same, or that had been changed. A spontaneous, wholesome, old-fashioned conversation; the kind, I could see, to do them both good.

Yet neither of them, I was sure, had lost much love upon Duluth. And that, too, came out presently, and it perhaps even bet-

tered their understanding—the fact they had both suffered Duluth!

It gave them new ground to go over, new memories to evoke.

Whereupon, seeing them so satisfactorily launched, and myself so unnecessary, I left them to give attention to other guests.

Afterward, in the intervals of my casual duties as host, I found myself glancing more than once involuntarily in their direction.

It was in one of these intervals that there occurred for me the very strangest illusion concerning Monica West and Allan Gregg.

I had become, after a little, rather abruptly aware that I was looking at them, not out of any host-like concern as to how they were getting on, but because, as they sat there together, they satisfied some entirely detached esthetic sense, some purely professional instinct for “arrangement” — for contrast. Monica, with her black hair and color and deep-gray eyes — all health and youth and beautiful definite line. And Gregg, all suggestion, indefinite, grayed, with that one note of his tie to bring him to life. And his smile, which receded only as far as his eyes, resting there, helping him to emerge.

Then, suddenly, as if there had been some magic in the vision, there came that strange

momentary illusion in which those two seemed fixed, as I saw them there, irrevocably—like two figures painted, without their consent, upon a canvas from which they could not, if they would, escape.

And for that moment I have to this day, and shall always have, a curious sense of guilt.

## CHAPTER VIII

MONICA and I dined together that night at Jules's. I had asked Gregg to join us, but he had promised to report at Rue Reynouard at six, and, as a consequence, reminded of the appointment, had taken rather hurried leave. Before he went, however, we arranged that I should take him the next afternoon to see Monica's pictures.

When he had gone I could see that it was her intention to withhold whatever she had to say until we should be alone. She made it evident, in her own way, that she *had* something to say. As I turned back from seeing him off, she said, "What a surprise!"

"Seeing Gregg?" I asked.

"No, his being like that."

What she meant, and why "his being like that" constituted a surprise, had an entirely sufficient explanation when, at eight, many lesser matters disposed of, we faced each other across the table at Jules's, and came to speak, almost simultaneously, of Gregg.

Monica repeated the assertion of her surprise.

"It only proves," she said, "that one ought never to judge. . . . People thought him a snob, you know, in Duluth."

I asked if she had thought him that, too.

"I think, if you had asked me, I should have said he was. And I'd have had nothing whatever to base it upon—any more than *they* had!"

There was so much self-condemnation in what she said, and in the impatient little gesture with which she accompanied it, that there was no necessity for her to say that her opinion had been reversed. And it seemed to me the most charming compliment she had paid to Gregg by so generously blaming herself.

"I suppose," she said, "it must have been his manner."

I said that to me his manner seemed almost painfully shy.

"We thought him *blasé*, in Duluth!"

I laughed, and she threw back her head as if she were going to laugh, but smiled and went on instead:

"You see, there were other things. He didn't go about—fraternize; and he didn't work; he didn't *do* anything! And that, in Duluth, was the unpardonable sin!"

She laughed then, and went on after a moment to say that she had never, as a matter of fact, even seen Allan Gregg more than a dozen times in her life; and to paint for me, quickly, as she alone could, the series of rather highly colored pictures he had presented to her as a child.

The first, long ago, in a pony-cart passing by in the street, a delicate little boy sitting very straight beside his nurse, and looking, as he had been bidden, neither to the right nor to the left.

Later, he had appeared an almost supernatural figure sitting beside the chauffeur in the first automobile that had come to Duluth.

After that he had been away a good deal at school; but she had seen him with his father and mother on those two or three rare occasions when a good play had come to the theater for one night, or a famous singer from Chicago or New York, and she had been allowed to go, in the balcony. The Greggs sat in a box, he in evening dress, very slim and young and elegant, against the background of those heavy, forbidding old parents of his. She remembered resenting the attitude of the half-grown boys about her who nudged one another and laughed when Allan Gregg took his seat. She resented it because



she liked looking at him; because it seemed more like being at the theater to see some one in full dress in a box. But secretly she thought him affected and very *blasé*.

I asked if she remembered the house, and she said yes, that it was the biggest house in town, the biggest and the most wonderful. And when I told her how Perryman had described it, she said that she was perfectly willing to change her opinion of Gregg, but that she was afraid nothing would ever alter her belief in the marvel and desirability of that house. Nothing, that is, short of bringing it to her, here in Paris, and proving it to be different, as I had brought Gregg.

Reminded then of how long she had really been away, I asked if she had heard of Gregg's marriage.

"Marriage?" she said, "marriage?" And seemed by her surprise to accuse me of withholding so important a piece of news for purely dramatic effect. And yet there was in her tone no more than the natural regret any woman might feel who had made that discovery about a man whom she had found interesting and agreeable, and whom she had believed to be unattached.

There was also no more than the proportionate note of relief when I hastened to say

that it had turned out badly, that there had been a divorce.

"Divorce?" she echoed again, accusing me this time of unnecessary suspension of interest, and surprised by the last news even more than the first. "When did it happen, and where? I've never heard!"

I repeated the story for her, as I had had it from Perryman's letter; and she listened, without asking a question or making even a comment. But when I came to the part about the wife's having taken the child, her sympathy, which must have been growing through my recital, showed itself suddenly in her involuntary exclamation:

"Poor fellow! . . . No wonder!"

"No wonder what?" I asked, curious to know what was passing in her mind.

"No wonder he seems so out of touch with life—so alone."

So she had seen that in him, too; but then, of course, any one could see that; it was the first thing one noticed about him, except, perhaps, one's impression of his wish not to be.

How far Monica's intuition had followed the course of my own, and of Perryman's, was apparent in the very next thing she said.

She had remained silent a moment, think-

ing; and she brought it out presently with the conviction of prophecy.

"He's going to find himself, over here. It's the turning-point of his life."

I said, merely to test her, that it was likely to be the turning-point of many men's lives.

"But for him," she said, "I think it's going to be—different."

And "different" was of course what we all felt it was going to be. No one of us knew how, or tried, for that matter, to formulate that expectation. But what we felt was the same. And it had nothing at all to do with deeds of valor; almost nothing to do with war. Yet only the war could have served. He was going out, next week, or the week after that, to his great experience, and there he should find himself, should cure his soul of its ennui, and bring somehow out of it the will and the power to build his own life. It should strike off the fetters of his inertia as it should strike the chains of tyranny from the world.

I had Perryman's letter still in my pocket, and I read her the phrase in which he had referred to the "miracle about to be worked."

It pleased her tremendously, this corroboration of her own prophecy by some one she had never seen.

"What a beautiful thing for one man to say of another!" she cried, and added, after a moment's brooding: "He should do something really worth while, with every one believing in him so much."

After another moment she said, as if she had traveled far since her last remark, "I like your friend Perryman."

And then, after still another ruminating silence, in which she tasted her dessert once or twice thoughtfully, she said, "It must have given Duluth a shock, his going off to war!"

## CHAPTER IX

**I**T was in one of the oldest and most respectable *pensions* in Paris that Monica lived. A friend in America had given her, when she came, a stranger, for the first time to France, a letter of introduction to Madame Gironde, and recommended the *pension*.

It was a *pension* one could recommend, for, no matter how many years elapsed before you arrived, it would still be there, and no matter what wars came and went, there would be always the same perfect food and the same excellent white wine in two rows of bottles down the length of the long table, like emissaries of good cheer sent out two by two, in order, each meal, by Madame Gironde from her place at the end.

*"Le plus extraordinaire  
Vin ordinaire,  
De Madame Gironde!"*

Monica had made up a little song about it one day when I first knew her—for our pri-

vate entertainment. One would never let Madame Gironde hear them singing that song. It would be taking a liberty.

No one ever knew where she bought such wine. No one ever asked. It seemed to partake of both the dignity and the permanency of Madame Gironde herself. Just as everything in the *pension* partook of it. Even the guests of Madame Gironde achieved a unique permanency by the paradox of continual change; of giving way each season to a duplicate lot who gave a much more perfect illusion of being actually the same people than the same people, grown older, could ever have done. No one remained year after year to grow old and changed and pathetic, and remind one of the passage of time, of the impermanency of human life or the fickleness of fortune.

There was always the same assortment, following, it must have been, some mysterious secret formula of Madame Gironde's. Always the same number of titles—a baron and a baronne, and a countess; there was always the wife of a professional "*militaire*," a foreign clerk of some famous bank, and some female relative, a mother, a wife, or a sister; an unattached elderly man of small means and large leisure; and one or two un-

attached women. And there was always an artist. Never a poet, a writer, musician—but always an artist. Why, no one ever knew. Perhaps it had something to do with Madame Gironde's formula; or it may have been due merely to the one big alcoved room with north light at the back of the house. I was that artist once. Monica was that artist now, as she had been once before, when she first came to Paris. For now and then some one, and nearly always it was the semi-outsider, the artist, would come back again, but no one, by some unspoken, unwritten law, ever remained at one time more than a single season.

No one, that is, except Mademoiselle Gironde, the daughter of madame, and one other who sat day in and day out, year in and year out, behind the round table with the red cover in the corner of the tiny *salon*, and who was called merely "Mademoiselle." But in no wise did either of these two destroy that illusion of permanence. For they also had achieved the same end by the simple method of getting no older.

Mademoiselle Gironde had reached the delicate thirties, and was, in spite of the fine air of cynicism with which she tried to obscure it, still beautiful, and young enough

to wear becomingly her dainty *retroussé* nose, which always recalled the line "tip tilted like a floweret gay." But it was also a sad little flower, recalling another poet's phrase—Châteaubriand's "gathered yesterday." Mademoiselle Gironde was always reminding one of poets—and of Romance. Not that there was anything in the least romantic about her, or that she ever spoke of any of these things; but because there hung in the tiny *salon*, which opened directly off the dining-room, a large square oil-painting of Mademoiselle Gironde, life size, to the waist. She had on a big, high-crowned poke bonnet, with wide blue ribbons, and a ruffled square-cut dress, and you were told, when you asked, having recognized suddenly one day the charming tip tilted nose, that it was painted by an artist who had once lived at Madame Gironde's. It was then you thought of Romance. It may have been because of a kind of gay, delightful tenderness in the picture, which seemed to take its cue from the nose, and it may have been the beautiful deep gilt frame which surrounded it lavishly, like the extravagant gift of a lover.

The picture hung out from the wall, and was much too big for the room; but then it was a room in which everything seemed quite



properly and comfortably too big. Even the piano, an upright, seemed too big, and crowded the mantel of the little fireplace, and the mantel shoved the head of the sofa hard into the corner, and sent it around the side of the room under the painting of *Mademoiselle Gironde*; and the sofa stopped just in time to allow the door to open into its corner; and open, it just escaped the wide double arch that separated the little *salon* from the dining-room; and in the next corner, extending a little into the arch, stood the round table which had once graced the center of a dining-room, covered with a figured red cover, behind which, in the corner, sat that other "*Mademoiselle*." And beyond the table of "*Mademoiselle*" there was just enough room for an upholstered chair by the window, before you came to the piano again. And this "*Mademoiselle*," enchained there in her corner by some mysterious, invisible malady, about which one never, for some reason, asked, seemed as much a part of that room as the sofa or the piano.

I had always an impression that her feet, or one foot at least, rested on another chair under the table. But the figured red cover was long and concealing, and my impression was never confirmed. One never asked ques-

tions about "Mademoiselle"—who she was or how she had come there—as one hesitates to ask about, say, a work of art which seems to be taken for granted by every one else. One feels, somehow, after that length of time, it would be a little absurd to ask. I never knew her name, or what her illness was, or how she came to Madame Gironde's. But I had in the back of my mind a vague idea—perhaps I overheard it, or some one told me—of her having come, oh, twenty years ago, from South America to consult the famous doctors of Paris, but that they had done her no good. It may have been wrong, and it was surely responsible for my belief that the books she read, bound in black, with worn-off gilt titles, were printed in Spanish; and that the letters she wrote so often were written in that language. When she spoke, unexpectedly as she did now and then, entering a conversation as if she had taken part from the first, the crisp, intellectual, almost literary fluency of her French gave the surprising effect of her being, of a sudden, tremendously modern. One could easily for a moment imagine that she had just discarded a tailor suit for this loose gray dress and the little shawl, and had dropped down there in the corner to rest from her day's

activities. Yet she had sat there day in and day out, for all those years, behind the round table with the red-figured cover, and there had reached her only such shadowy echoes of modernity as found, or lost, their way into the tiny *salon* of Madame Gironde's *pension*.

No one had ever seen "Mademoiselle" come in or go out. She simply appeared, sometime during each morning, and she was always there at night so long as any one else remained. Her meals were brought to her there, and put down on an oblong white cloth across the corner of the table before her. I have no idea in what direction her room lay, just as I never had an idea where Madame Gironde's kitchen was.

The dinners simply came forth, when the guests were assembled, and Madame Gironde, from her place at the head of the table, produced, by the turn of her head toward the door, like the preliminary expert gesture of a prestidigitator, her unvarying phenomenon. The swinging doors opened, and Rosalie and Lizette appeared, like two confederates, blooming and fresh in clean white aprons, both bearing platters, deliciously filled, and, going quickly to either end of the table, began serving, in opposite directions.

It was of the infallible excellence of these

dinners that I had heard Monica at last one day complain.

There was something "heartless" about them, she said; something almost cruel in their indifference to the existing order of things, and every one else in Paris complaining of the difficulty of getting food, and the high prices, and the scarcity of coal.

It was not only wrong, but downright wicked, that anything should go on so unperturbed, so exactly the same, as Madame Gironde's *pension*. It didn't seem to know there was any war, and didn't seem to care.

"The women," she said, "don't even knit for the soldiers. They do fancy-work for themselves! Clutter the *salon* with it every night, and compare stitches! Even that old one who's a colonel's wife does nothing but crochet on a silly pink-and-mauve thing for herself."

You'd have thought, she said, from sheer boredom they'd have talked about the war. But, no; they were like people asleep at midday and dreaming an old dream.

Yet Monica stayed. And she was free to confess that it had been just that enduring sameness that had taken her back, this time, to Madame Gironde's. It had saved her sanity then. But there were days when one had

other needs besides the saving of one's sanity. And of late, when I dropped in to see Monica at her work, and might naturally have been lured by one of Madame Gironde's dinners to stay, I had fallen into the habit of asking Monica to come out with me instead, to dine at one of the gay cafés, outside, under the trees, where soldiers on *permission*, in svelte new uniforms of horizon blue, dined with their sweethearts, and Russian or Serbian officers, looking very warlike and handsome in their brilliant uniforms and decorations, swaggered among the tables, and now and then a huge, sandy-haired Highlander in kilts drew all eyes to his bare knees. We amused ourselves by constructing what Monica called the "*pétite histoire*" of each of the soldiers, by the insignia they wore; how many years' service; how many times wounded; what branch of the army, what regiment, and what rank; and then the decorations, which involved subtleties. If, for instance, it happened to be an officer, and he wore the *Croix* and the *Médaille* and the *Légion d'Honneur*, we said that he had been promoted from the ranks because of valorous deeds; if, on the other hand, he wore only the *Croix* and the *Légion*, we said he had got them by favor, unless he reversed

the decision himself by the modesty of his manner or some attractive characteristic. But if he were a private soldier, a *poilu*, and had them all—the *Légion*, the *Médaille*, and the *Croix*—and a sufficiently grim array of wound chevrons on his right sleeve, and service chevrons on his left, then we had no longer a *petite*, but *une grande histoire*, to be reread, and discussed, and conjectured about.

And suddenly, a few minutes before half past nine, the colorful scene would begin to dissolve before our eyes, the bill would be presented hurriedly, with an apology, and paid under dimmed lights, the change brought out and counted with difficulty in semi-darkness; and we would find ourselves again in that deep, perpetual twilight of half-past-nine-o'clock Paris, that sad, unnatural twilight that brought the war home to us much more than all the many colored uniforms of that other scene which seemed now like a vanished bright dream. But we were thankful at least for that brief defiance of truth.

Knowing all this, and how Monica had always declared these dinners welcome escapes indeed from the dull routine of Madame Gironde's *table d'hôte*, it surprised me a little to hear her suggest, in the midst of our

call the following day, that I bring Gregg one night to dine at the *pension*.

It came after a half an hour pervaded by a spirit which had long been stranger to that wide-alcoved room with the north light which Monica used as her studio. Canvases, stacked carelessly against the wall, on the floor or hanging where she had placed them, to catch the best light, on the day of her arrival, spoke more eloquently than words could have done of the struggle, the determinations and the vacillations of those last months. There were a few, framed and varnished and finished, to speak of a time that went before, a time when the artist's hand was free and firm, her spirit swift and adventurous. Of the others, and there were many, not one was complete. One or two seemed to lack only the finishing stroke. Some had progressed midway, and failed for want of faith; and some were mere fragments abandoned as they were begun.

Gregg had crossed almost at once to stand before an unframed canvas hanging on the side wall. He had selected it unerringly in his first survey of the room, passing more striking ones. A woman in cheap mourning buying two roses from the venders back of the Madeleine. A picture which told its

story tenderly yet pitilessly without an extra word. Gregg stood before it silently, his hat still in his hand, and it was only when he had taken in to his satisfaction every separate charming detail of it that he turned and spoke in his quiet, unemotional voice.

"I like that," he said, and no more, but seemed somehow to have arrived at a fullness of praise by leaving so much unsaid.

And it was praise, I could see, which Monica, in spite of herself, believed. I had praised her work, that very canvas, and so had others, and she had said we did it only to give her heart, and begged us to desist, since she knew how hopeless, how dead, they really all were.

But Gregg's praise was not of a kind to reject.

"I'm glad you like it," she said. "I've been out of humor with it of late."

"Out of humor? Why?" There was incredulity and almost reproof in Gregg's voice.

"Because, I suppose, I've been out of humor with everything."

Gregg looked at the picture again, as if searching some flaw, and then, "I don't see how you could be, with that. Do you?" he asked, turning to me for support. And I gave it, as warmly as I knew how, and although



I was conscious of repeating almost the same words of praise I had used before, Monica received them as if she heard them now for the first time.

"Then you think," she addressed us both, "that it's worth finishing?"

"What is there to finish about it?" asked Gregg; and it was then that the spirit which had long been stranger to that room came back. For Monica had begun to explain, pointing out with her sensitive, eager hand what she intended still to do with the picture. What, mind you, she *intended* to do. It had been long since I had heard her voice so vibrant, so alive.

And once the spirit had come back, it touched everything in the room. All those half-finished pictures, finding themselves believed in again, seemed to take on new contours of beauty and to catch again the gleam of their first inspiration. Even the fragments, begun and discarded in a day, seemed to promise anew their fulfilment.

And there followed that half-hour, borrowed out of another time, in which we talked about the painting of pictures as if, to use Monica's phrase to me, "they still mattered to the world, and more, as if they still mattered to us."

It was then, when we had begun to speak of other things, of Paris and of France, since it was Gregg's first visit—that Monica made her suggestion about bringing Gregg to dine.

I said that since he was to have so short a time, we might better, the three of us, go to some gayer place.

"Oh, *gayer*," said Monica; "but it's Paris he wants to see, and certainly there's nothing like Madame Gironde's outside of Paris."

I said that of course that was true, and Gregg remarked that he had never seen a *pension*, and that he should like it very much; and then, with his characteristic brevity, asked, "Why not to-night, since we're here?"

And so it was decided that Monica should consult Madame Gironde, and if it proved convenient we should stay. Madame Gironde sent word that she would be pleased to have us, and so it was arranged.

## CHAPTER X

I SHALL always believe that some magic lay over Madame Gironde's *pension* that afternoon and that night. There had been presage of it there in the studio; and later when I went to seek Madame herself to pay my respects in the tiny *salon*, I encountered another brief unforgettable glimpse, like the lifting, for a second, of a veil from my eyes.

Madame was sorting the afternoon mail, just arrived, as I entered the *salon*. "Mademoiselle," behind her red-covered table, glanced up from the letter she was writing to answer my greeting and my inquiry as to her health, with her invariable "*Très bien, monsieur.*"

Madame had put down her letters to shake hands with me, when there came through the dining-room into the *salon* one of those two or three unattached women living now in the *pension*. I had seen her before—a faded ash blonde of no particular age, dressed always in unbecoming pale shades of green or

light blue. Her name I knew to be Madame Latour, but I had always thought of her as unmarried. I had never heard her speak more than three words beyond the civilities, and those she accomplished, as she did now, with the merest murmur and inclination of her head.

Seeing her, Madame Gironde took up the letters again, selected one, and held it out to her. Madame Latour received it with a scarcely audible murmur of thanks, and passed again through the double arch into the dining-room, where she stood to open her letter by the light that came in at the window.

Madame Gironde followed her with her eyes.

"It never fails," she whispered, nodding her head. "By the same post." Her eyes left Madame Latour only long enough to catch the inquiry of mine. "Her husband—he writes every day, from the front."

I looked toward Madame Latour, the letter open now in her hand.

It was not the light from the window. Madame Latour was transfigured.

A kind of light was upon her, a glow that came from within, like the glow of a somber-hued vase into which, at a certain hour every evening, holy water is poured.

And this was she whom I had called "unattached!"

Still reading her letter, she turned and, as if she neither saw us nor was moved by any volition of her own, traversed the length of the dining-room, and passed through the door, with the light still upon her.

Everything was the same again, the dim little *salon*, the dim dining-room, and we three, "Mademoiselle" in her shadowy corner bending over her little square of white paper, and Madame Gironde and I.

Yet, in that room, at that hour, every day . . . a miracle took place.

That night at dinner I watched her come in with the rest. A faded ash blonde in an unbecoming drab dress, who, when she had murmured her greetings, lapsed into silence. She was opaque now, and no glow came through. Had the holy water, I wondered, been dipped out so soon on the fingers of fear, or had it sunk deep down into the invisible crypt of her heart?

The dinner progressed, and the staccato chatter of French filled the room. We had been placed together, Monica in the middle, and Gregg and I at either side. Across from Gregg sat the plump little Countess Rivat, with the admirably coiffed red hair and the

red-brown eyes, and laces that had in the heyday of her youth adorned the bodice of some *grande toilette*. The countess spoke English with the accent of a precocious child, and was openly fond of Americans. There had been always a faint resentment discernible against her in the *pension*, a resentment perhaps of the persistence of her graces. And so, when she began speaking across the table to us, with a special graciousness for Gregg, whom Monica had introduced before we sat down, there passed from eye to eye a subtle commenting glance, too quickly withdrawn for interpretation. And Monica, who felt rather than saw the glance, drew the Countess Rivat further into the conversation, so that she quite outdid herself in her English by way of thanks.

Gregg had won her heart at once, and I overheard her telling Monica, afterward: "*Monsieur est gentil, très, très gentil! Sympathique, comme les Américains!*"

This was after dinner, when we had risen from the table and were standing about for a few moments, talking.

Gregg was talking to Mademoiselle Gironde, who also spoke English, beautifully, though I never knew where she had learned it.

Already Madame la Baronne and she who

was the wife of a colonel had disappeared out of the dining-room, and appeared again in the little *salon*, side by side on the sofa, under the painting of Mademoiselle Gironde, with their crocheting and fancy-work.

Madame Latour had gone, and others were drifting out through the door.

The countess, talking to Monica and looking toward Gregg, seemed suddenly to conceive an idea. She caught Monica's arm and, looking about for me, drew me into the conference.

"What do you say," she said, "pairhaps monsieur would like? A little *musique*, eh? Yes? Since so long you have not played. You would like, monsieur," she called across to Gregg, "if Mademoiselle West will play the piano, pairhaps?"

"Very much," said Gregg, the smile coming into his eyes.

"Wait!" cried the countess. "I shall bring my—what you call—fancy-work!" And she disappeared suddenly out of the room.

"Would it bore you?" asked Monica of Gregg.

"I'd like it," said Gregg, "really, very much."

"Ah, you see?" cried the countess, who was suddenly back in the room, holding a bit of

white and pale-blue crochet-work in her hand, "Monsieur has taste!"

Persuaded, Monica crossed to the piano, where Gregg, after a moment's hesitation, followed, and the two stood looking over together the little stack of music, old songs and worn opera scores, that had lain for so long undisturbed. Monica was never an expert musician, but she played well, with warmth and musical feeling rare in an amateur. For months she had not touched the piano, since she had been "out of humor" with music, as she had been with pictures, with life, with herself. One avenue of expression closed, all others closed of themselves.

But to-night some magic lay, as I knew, over the *pension* of Madame Gironde.

And with the first touch of Monica's hands on the keys it was plain that her music was to partake, too, of magic, not of technique, but magic of the heart. For it was not pianistic music she played, but the accompaniments of those old songs, and bits of opera scores; the most potent music in all the world, for it is haunted music—haunted by the ghosts of half-forgotten words, of lovely, tragical scenes, of nights at the Opéra, of emotions lived through, of voices of exquisite singers long stilled.



Now it was an old score of "Orfeo," played as if to herself, turning the pages when she pleased, or nodding her head for Gregg to turn them, which brought memories crowding, and, how ever modern we had considered ourselves, wrought a spell over us all.

Madame Gironde had brought a chair from the dining-room, and sat now just within the arch, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes half closed and dreaming. Mademoiselle Gironde had brought her weekly accounts to the table across from that other "Mademoiselle," and sat now, her back to the piano, adding up, with a sharp-pointed pen, little columns of figures. Now and then she began to add her column again, and stirred uneasily, as if resisting the spell of the music, for across the corner of each of the opera scores and on the covers of the old songs was written the name "Mirielle Gironde" in a fine, girlish hand.

The countess and I sat side by side near the end of the dining-table. The dining-room lights had been turned down, so that we were in darkness except for the light that came through from the *salon*. The countess had taken a long time to begin her crocheting, winding and unwinding the yarn, and adjusting and readjusting her needle. And then

she pretended, a few moments, to crochet, but laid the work down abruptly, unconsciously, and seemed surprised to find her hands empty. She took up the work then, with a quick glance at me, and began to crochet furiously, round after round of the white and pale-blue yarn. The music had produced for her some strange agitation, of which she was, I believe, for a moment ashamed. Now and then, as she worked, she nodded her head or her body swayed to a phrase of the music. And presently, when the music had strayed into the accompaniments of a group of old French *chansons*, the countess hummed a little, lightly, under her breath. "I use to sing zat song, for my husban', when he were alive," she said, in an undertone. She hummed again, a lovely passage or two. "I could sing very well, very well indeed. And I have my *salon* . . . many famous people . . . when my husban' . . ." She drifted again into the melody, as if she had only been talking to herself.

And all at once I had discovered a secret. The Countess Rivat was jealous—jealous of the new glories of France, resentful of the new day in which her husband had no part.

And she clung to a bit of crochet, as if it helped to keep back the tears. I began to

wonder what she was making so assiduously, since it was like nothing I had ever seen. In a pause of the music I asked her. She held it up for a moment before her, an absurd, shapeless thing, and very small, too small for anything but a doll.

"Pairhaps I make—somesing else." She tried to smile, but her lips were unsteady and her brown eyes moist. She was terribly embarrassed, like a child caught in an absurdity. For of course she had not been making anything, crocheting for the sake of crocheting, to seem like the rest, but blinded by tears, hot tears of loneliness and defeat. She managed her smile, and then, as if seeking escape in the sound of her own voice, she leaned out and addressed "Mademoiselle," silent there in her corner behind the figured red cover.

"Perhaps I shall make something for one of your godsons, Mademoiselle—a jacket, perhaps, or a scarf!"

And I heard "Mademoiselle" answering in her fine, fluent French that that would be very amiable indeed of madame, and that she had that very day received a request for a scarf.

But "Mademoiselle" — what had she to do with godsons? The countess, surprised

that I did not know, and relieved to think of some one else, answered me in an undertone: Did I not know "*Mademoiselle*" was *mar-raine* to thirty-six *poilus*? She writes letters to them all, very beautiful letters. Had I not seen her writing? It kept her very busy indeed. A little sad, was it not? "*Mademoiselle*" was also a soldier—" *prisonnière, mais toujours brave!*"

A wand had touched "*Mademoiselle*." So those were the letters I had believed to be written in Spanish!

The music, slow and beautiful, of an old German *lied* filled the room. And the wand that had touched "*Mademoiselle*" seemed now to have touched each one, transforming them all for a moment into themselves. It was such an enchantment as music alone may work.

I looked at Madame Gironde. And I saw that she was no longer Madame Gironde, but suddenly a very tired, very old lady, who rested now with folded hands and closed eyes, after a day filled with inconceivably petty cares—cares of which no one knew, of which she never spoke. Poor Madame Gironde! She, too, was "*prisonnière*"; she, too, was "*toujours brave*"!

On the sofa, madame the colonel's wife;

very military in her black-braided dress and the heavy, long, gold chain like a regimental decoration, sat upright and rigid, as became the wife of a colonel, as if she awaited the carrying out of orders. By her side, less rigid and less military, but upright, sat Madame la Baronne, like an aide. And madame the colonel's wife worked steadily with unseeing eyes and strong, nervous hands upon an endless succession of pink and mauve squares. Madame la Baronne's needle flashed automatically, in and out where a red flower grew between her embroidery hoops. And suddenly—for the spell of the music was also upon them—I saw that they, too, did in reality await the execution of orders; and that they sought, by the illusion of mauve and pink squares and embroidered red flowers, to crowd out other visions, and by talk of stitch and design to avoid other speech.

At the piano, Monica, herself surely touched by the wand, still played the accompaniment of the tender old song, and Gregg, his slim, gentle hand like a caress on the music, waited to turn the page.

Beside them, at the table, Mademoiselle Gironde no longer added accounts. She sat now with head bent, all her resistance gone; and all the fine cynicism, too, had gone from

her face, leaving her almost piteously beautiful and piteously sad. Her lips moved to the words of the old song, "Ich Grolle Nicht!" . . . Her eyes dreamed into space. . . .

Behind me, in the gloom at the far end of the long table, some one stirred.

Madame Latour had crept in, alone, to listen in the dark.

## CHAPTER XI

ON Wednesday, at four, I had an appointment in the Avenue Wagram, near the Étoile. The day was delightful, a fall day that might have been spring, so that I chose to forsake the Métro at the Concorde and walk the length of the Champs-Élysées. Every crippled soldier in Paris, every nursemaid, and every cocotte seemed to have been of the same mind. Even the colors on the Avenue seemed faded to the pastels of early spring. The nursemaids passed, in their long gray or black capes, holding the hands of their tiny charges, who danced along like animated brilliantly colored flowers. Little thin stems of brown buttoned legs—and preposterously short frocks—lavender, with a big, nodding purple bonnet; apple green, with an emerald bonnet; pale blue, with the bonnet of a bright, deep shade. And slim, adorably grave little boys, all in black or brown or very dark plum. Whatever else might befall Paris, the children would always remain the same—irresistible, exquisite.

The smartest cocottes wore mourning, with long crepe veils, and jettied bands under the chin. Soldiers, convalescent, hobbled along on crutches and wooden legs, in groups of two and three, or sat on the benches, taking the sun.

I walked briskly, and the whole scene seemed to drift past me noiselessly, of its own accord, and to take on, as such scenes so often did in those days, a curious overlay of unreality.

Half-way up the Avenue, two figures coming toward me at a little distance began to detach themselves insistently from the others. I watched them approach idly, and presently, with a start, found myself face to face with Monica and Allan Gregg.

Gregg was in uniform, which had prevented my recognizing him immediately, for it had worked a tremendous change. He was broader of shoulder and chest, more compact and fit and alert—a different man in uniform. And if Gregg was changed, Monica, at his side, seemed even more vivified. Her eyes were blue, the reflected blue of her gown and of the skies. And a little warm flush tinted her throat where the soft collar turned back. There was something about her—about them both—that suggested two chil-



dren caught running away. Something a little too ready about her explanation, a little too elaborate. You might have thought me her guardian. They were going, they said, to a certain gallery in the Louvre which was open that afternoon, and had intended to drop in on me later; and wouldn't I go with them now? I declined, pleading my engagement, and duly enjoyed the generosity of their regrets.

"You'll go with us next time, then," said Gregg, revealing with his usual inclusiveness the implications of his "us" and the fact that there was already established the certainty of a "next time."

When, after a few moments, they left me and went on their way, Gregg's good-by was merged and lost in Monica's clear overtones. . . .

I have no memory now of any one day when I became aware that those two were in love. It was by so gradual, yet so swift and inevitable, a progression that I found myself, without any sense of its strangeness or of its suddenness, in possession of that knowledge. As if, in fact, I had expected it from the first.

And perhaps, without telling myself so, I had.

Perhaps I had seen it that first afternoon of their meeting, in a kind of clairvoyant flash, which I had believed to be an illusion.

Perhaps I had seen it that night at Madame Gironde's, when they two, at the piano, fell victims to their own enchantment—an enchantment from which there was no one to set them free.

And I, least of any one, would have sought to dispel it.

For, as lovers always seem to do, they carried about with them a magical atmosphere, into which every one in their presence was drawn. I am sure it was so with me, and I was with them, naturally, more than any one. For they seemed to have an absurdly exaggerated idea of what was due me; so that they seldom went any place without asking me to go along. I was always receiving *pneumatiques*, asking me to meet them all sorts of queer places, for dinner, for tea, or for an excursion.

They went everywhere, crowding into those days memories to furnish a time to come. But unconsciously, I believe, for they never spoke of his going, except to include it quite naturally in the apportionment of their time. There was a week at least, at the beginning, when they saw only the present; when no

shadow of separation had fallen upon them. For it had not yet come to that. A week in which they went about seeking beauty together—and finding it everywhere.

For Paris, the beautiful, who had so long veiled her face from us in melancholy, seemed to lift the veil, for a moment, to see them pass by.

And the bright autumn days continued to give their illusion of spring.

My memory of that time is a memory almost entirely of emotion—of the marvel of Monica's face; of Gregg's quiet, unspoken happiness which seemed to tremble always on the verge of speech. I think it was a kind of selfishness that made me, just by appearing not to notice how things were, help them along. It was good merely to know that love could still transform into beauty a world so filled with sorrow and hate. It gave me, somehow, reassurance for which I shall always be thankful to them.

Only when I was away from them could I bring myself to consider my own responsibility. For even if I had not felt it before, Monica put it upon me now by that exaggerated sense of what was my due. Not, of course, that I could have prevented their falling in love; I could only have interrupted

its course, have begged them to think where they were leading, all of which would have been no use.

Perhaps it was my realization of this, coupled with the fact that they seemed—however I looked at it—so admirably suited, that kept me from speaking.

Their very difference seemed to strike so beautiful a balance that it came to be actually difficult to think of them separately. And they satisfied, in their divergence, something far more than my mere painter's instinct for "arrangement."

Even Alice Germaine, who adored Monica, and who made a fourth with us on more than one of those excursions, confided to me, on the very first day she saw them together, that they were "meant." And this at a very moment when one of their chief differences was most apparent.

We had gone to the Panthéon, where Gregg had wished to see the Puvis de Chavannes murals of The Life of Sainte-Genevieve. He had admired the detail reproductions, and Monica had expected him to be disappointed in the originals. But he was not. They were less harsh, he said, less colorful. And Monica said that was just the reason she thought he would be disappointed.

"But they're so perfectly in keeping with the subject," he said.

"That," said Monica, "is the thing I believe I dislike about them."

"You dislike their being in keeping?"

"Their being so perfect!" she said.

And when, a little later, they went to look at the "Jeanne d'Arc" panels, that lovely succession of pictures the very color of life, Gregg accused Monica, who admired them tremendously, of not objecting to *their* perfection.

"Oh, I don't object to perfection," she laughed, "when there's something else besides!"

Gregg smiled and said that it came, then, merely to her having a preference for Jeanne d'Arc and not caring for Sainte-Genevieve.

"That's it!" said Monica, rejoiced at being illogical.

But "that" was really not "it" at all. It was essentially the difference of their tastes. For Gregg's taste was unerringly for perfection, though he had no objection to the "something else besides." And Monica sought so instinctively for the "something else besides" that when she found it she forgot to look for perfection. She had—shall I call it?—a creative taste. I have seen her

admire things that were really badly done; things, for instance, that I couldn't admire, because of their falling short; things that Gregg would never admire because of their imperfection. But the artist's intention, the artist's desire, were foremost in her vision. She judged the finished picture by the impulse which had begun it. And this was true of her in all her relationships—to life, and to her friends. She did not judge by accomplishment. She judged you by your best intention. She gave you credit for your innermost desire.

It was this which made her so good an artist. And it was this which imbued her, now that she had fallen in love, with so beautiful a passion for giving. It was the secret of why she had chosen Gregg.

## CHAPTER XII

OF what passed between them during those days I have, as I had then, no coherent idea—how much was said, or how fully they came to understand each other. Yet I imagined that there must have been moments, brief, perhaps, but more revealing because of that, in which they arrived at perfect understanding.

Two weeks had gone by, and, so far as I knew, no *ordre de mouvement* had come for Gregg. And I had no heart to prick the iridescent bubble of their happiness by asking, at least in Monica's presence. And I never saw them apart.

Then, one day, just as I was beginning to worry about it, and to wonder if I couldn't do something to soften the blow when it fell, there came a knock at my studio door, and when I opened it Gregg stood there alone.

Involuntarily, before I thought, and because I was so accustomed to see them together, I asked, "Where's Monica?"

And he said, hesitating a little as if he were embarrassed, "She wouldn't come."

"Wouldn't come?" His tone had seemed to imply something more.

"No."

He came in and sat down, holding his cap in his hand. I felt sure there had been some trouble, some misunderstanding.

He was silent so long, as if he were seeking some way to begin, that I thought I should have to begin for him, and just as I had decided upon a question, he spoke.

"My order has come," he said. "I go out to join Section Ten."

Quiet as his voice was, it gave me a kind of shock, as if it had been my order instead of his.

He seemed to wait for my question.

"When do you go?" I asked.

"A man comes in from Section Ten Friday of next week. They're letting me take his place."

The word "letting" stood out by itself. If he could speak of it as a favor, then there must have been a misunderstanding indeed.

He waited again. I was sorry for him, terribly sorry, and it was plain that he was finding it hard to speak.

"Well," I said, thinking to open the way, "we'll have you with us, then, for a week."



He said, "Yes," absent-mindedly; and I had an impression that he was busy formulating some sentence in his mind, something he wished to say. If I had known what it was, I should have tried to help him out. But I didn't know. I certainly didn't know.

For presently he brought it out, as if he had finally formulated it to his satisfaction, eliminating every superfluous word and without any preface at all.

"Monica and I want to be married before I go."

It was my turn to sit there silent, trying to formulate some word. And before I had found it a little tap came at the door, and Monica, opening it, stood inside.

Her look flew between us, and then she went toward Gregg.

He rose quickly to meet her, and when she had reached him he put his arm very simply and gently about her. I saw his hand lying along her wrist, an incredibly light, but incredibly tender caress.

## CHAPTER XIII

**O**F course they wanted it kept secret. For Secrecy is ever the favorite bridesmaid of Romance. And then, there is no secret until it is given to some one to keep—and I was, in this case, chosen keeper. So I made my promise in all humility, and Monica said I was a dear, and sudden warm tears stood in her eyes.

My first idea had been that they could be married in my studio, with perhaps a few of Monica's friends, Alice Germaine and I standing up. I even went so far as to imagine people taking it for a boy-and-girl romance revived. And I imagined myself allowing them to go on thinking that; a ruse, obviously, of my conscience, defending itself inversely for making no protest. I think Monica half expected that I should intervene—in what way, and to what end, I think she hardly knew herself.

I even saw myself in the rôle of giving her away—elder brother, guardian—something at least rather close and necessary and important.

And when I spoke of it, suggesting the studio, I saw how unimportant I really was and how little it would, as a matter of fact, have deterred them for me to protest.

"You see, we shall have to go to England," said Gregg.

I asked why on earth it was necessary to go to England, and Gregg said because you couldn't be married in France without the written consent of your parents. A regulation I had heard often enough, but hadn't, in the excitement of their news, remembered.

"I'd forgotten that," I said.

"So had I," said Monica.

But Gregg said he remembered it because he had read it somewhere in a book.

Read it somewhere in a book! Well, it was Gregg. He was like that all through. It would have been, after all, more remarkable if he *hadn't* remembered.

I suggested that he might cable for his parents' consent.

They both spoke at once.

"But we don't want it known."

And looking, I confess, with a kind of sudden unexplainable apprehension at Monica, I saw that it was she even more than Gregg who didn't want it known.

To this day I am curious about that. I've

asked her about it, since; and she seemed herself not to know. For her answer was to look at me quickly as if I had presented for the first time an interesting point, and then merely to say: "That was queer, wasn't it—why I did that?"

There was no one in her case to hinder or object; no one to please or displease. Yet she didn't want it known. It was, I have had to convince myself, purely an instinct for self-preservation; though the instinct would, I am perfectly well aware, have been expected to take the opposite form. It may have been modesty. For she was making a breath-taking leap in the dark, and it is conceivable that she saw no reason to flaunt her daring in the face of the world.

Gregg said that he would gladly cable, except that Monica preferred that he shouldn't. And he was free to say that he thought it might be wiser and more pleasant in the end if the news were broken a little less suddenly, a statement so reasonable and so frank that it brought me at once to their point of view. Gregg *would* have cabled if Monica had said the word. I have never seen a man so free of duplicity. How entirely, how almost grotesquely free, I could not then know. So far as he was able to reveal himself, he did

so with the utmost candor. It was only that one always felt the unrevealed things to be of so much greater importance—the things he left unsaid.

Even now, my mind reverted to the thing Perryman had told me about never knowing, from Gregg's attitude, that he had ever seen the difference between his parents and himself. And I divined now that he must have known that no amount of explanation would ever make them understand the suddenness of this marriage, nor any amount of charm on Monica's part reconcile them to a daughter-in-law who had stepped so unvouched for and unannounced into the family.

"They'd think me an adventuress who'd stolen their son!" said Monica, quite unexpectedly following my train of thought. I really believe it was the first time those two old people in Duluth had presented themselves to her mind in the light of their future relationship, as a family of which she was to be a part. And I believe the thought frightened her and amused her at the same time. She had thought only of Gregg, separate from every one else in the world, and of the present, and of Paris where they were.

And I hastened to help put the other picture out of her mind, for it seemed only right

since it had come about in this way, that they should wrest from their few remaining days the greatest possible happiness. There would be time enough afterward for the facing of petty problems. To-day they should face, so far as it lay in my power to assist, only to-day and their joy.

And so, to be brief and old-fashioned as the fact itself—they were married. They made a flattering pretense of asking my advice, though they had everything already perfectly planned. Or, rather, Gregg had. The dozens of small details and formalities seemed clearly laid out in his mind, and he got through them, in that calm, unhurried way of his, with a most astonishing despatch. Monica merely did what he said, going about uplifted, resting in his decisions, glad of each small opportunity to obey.

They were to leave on Saturday morning for Calais, where they would take the night boat for Dover, going on up to London the following morning. They would be married at once, and have the week to themselves in London—and return only the day before Gregg was to leave for the front.

On Friday I went with them—the three of us in a *fiacre*, with me as a kind of official guide—to the consulates to have their pass-

ports *viséd*, to the *prefecture* for their *laissez-passers* and to the British military authorities for another *visé*, until Monica said that she felt as if we were not only publishing, but shouting the banns. Gregg had, because of his connection, to go through even more formalities. And in that time Monica managed her shopping miraculously.

At the *pension* she told Madame Gironde that she was going out of town for a week with friends.

On Saturday morning I saw them off, with my blessing, at the Gare du Nord—so early and so crystal clear a morning that it had all the effect of an elopement at dawn.

I thought of them almost hourly during that week, in the intervals of my work. And the thought always seemed to come clothed in the reflected glamour of their happiness

They came back to Paris by the noon train on Thursday, and telephoned me from the station. I was to meet them at once for lunch.

Whatever fears I had felt for their happiness vanished with my first sight of them, coming toward me in the café which was agreed upon as our meeting-place.

Monica included me in her radiance. Gregg's sudden, spontaneous smile lighted his face as he saw me. They could be prodigal

of their happiness. They could share it, generously, with an outsider like me.

I was somehow glad that they had so little that was definite to tell of the week in England; that at least had been wholly and perfectly theirs. And the present moment pressed them too close.

They had had, Monica said, a wonderful omen. At the very hour of their wedding the sun had struck gloriously through the gray London fog, and shone like a blessing until they had come out of the little rectory and lost it from sight.

"We shall always remember that, sha'n't we, Allan?"

"I shall," said Gregg, and moved his hand as if he would touch hers, but let it rest near on the table instead.

It had meant, I could see, almost a promise to her. And I believe that fear lay hidden deep in her heart, awaiting such omens for ill or for good. And I confess that I, too, felt a kind of reassurance to know that the sun had shone upon their wedding-day.

That afternoon and the next morning were filled with the thousand and one preparations for Gregg's departure. And I noticed how their positions seemed now reversed — for Monica had already begun to mother him.



She went about from shop to shop buying all sorts of little last-minute comforts, and instructing him not to neglect them. And it was he who rested now in her decisions, who seemed glad just to obey.

That afternoon, at four, we saw him off at the Gare de l'Est. I had neither wished nor intended to go, but they both were insistent. She wanted some one, Monica said, to be with her when he was gone.

Once we had passed through the gates to the train platform, I tried, as naturally as I could, to leave them to themselves. I went off on the pretext of getting a pillow from the pillow-vender for Gregg. He was to be late in the train.

At one side of the platform stood Gregg's train, doors locked, to the exasperation of a certain *sous-officier* who ran excitedly up and down, trying each one and seeming to consider their resistance a personal affront. Little groups came through the gates and moved or stood about, already stricken with the calm or the agitation of parting. On the other side of the platform the track was free; and suddenly, with a short, triumphant shriek, a battered third-class train ran in, like a thing pursued and unexpectedly safe, and stopped. And immediately from all the

exits, from the windows and doors and from over the roof, there issued a blue cloud, like smoke released from an air-tight compartment. It swirled and grew and filled the long platform—the blue-clad *permissionnaires* of the armies of France, home on their eight days' leave. One had glimpses, as they surged by, of lusty red faces, forward set; of dark-bearded, prematurely old faces; of wan, slim faces of youths; conjured, it seemed grotesquely, out of that swirling blue cloud, which wavered as it approached the gates, then swerved sharply to the left, to sweep with incredible swiftness through the great gate with the arched sign "PERMISSIONNAIRES" as if blown through by an invisible current of air. One remembered then the huddled, somber-garbed figures of women with expectant faces, waiting at the outer gate.

Again the long platform was clear, except for those fast-increasing groups, ringed about with all manner of luggage. Two handsome elderly officers, in brilliant new uniforms, paced slowly up and down, gloved hands behind them, never saying a word.

Four young *poilus*, pals, rounding off their *permission* with the luxury of a first-class compartment in the regular train, came through the gate, and paused abreast to exe-

cute excessively snappy salutes as the two handsome elderly officers passed gravely by.

A slim captain of artillery stood with one arm round his pretty, girlish wife, while in the other arm he held their baby, into whose tiny petal-sweet face they both smiled down a little tremulously.

Screened by these groups, I looked back to see Monica and Allan Gregg standing where I had left them. They had not moved, had not even shifted position, and I could see they had not been talking. Yet I was glad I had left them alone, for it seemed to me that, standing there side by side, some more subtle, more poignant communication than words was passing between them.

Train officials appeared and began unlocking the doors, and straightway the whole platform took on animation, calls for porters everywhere, baggage lifted and carried along, bumping into everybody, trucks piled high with trunks and officers' luggage—bound for the opposite end of the train. The four *poilus* clambered in at the first open door, and went through the train, looking for their compartment, and, when they had found it, clambered out again.

Gregg, turning, caught sight of me, and nodded.

"I thought you were lost," he said, as I came up. But Monica only smiled up at me and said, "You needn't stay away."

Gregg lifted his hand to signal a porter, who stopped abruptly in his headlong rush, arrested by the calm peremptoriness of that gesture amid all that calling, hurrying crowd. Gregg gave him his bag and his place number, and followed him into the train, whence he emerged to join us again presently.

And suddenly the whole platform had become tranquil again, while every one waited, with a kind of last-minute tensity, for the whistle that should announce the departure of the train. That absurd toy whistle which had had always so gay and irresponsible a sound, like a tin whistle blown suddenly into your ear by a playful child, to see you jump—but which had grown now to be so tragic a signal for the men and women of France.

And when, after a few moments, it came, startling us in spite of ourselves, it seemed to galvanize every one near into a frenzy of farewells—promises, admonitions, and blessings. The young captain of artillery clung to his wife and his baby for another and yet another last kiss. And in the midst of all this Allan Gregg and Monica were saying good-by. And again it seemed to me that

in their gentle, their infinitely tender embrace, and in their mutual "Good-by, dear!" and Monica's added, "Remember!" they had attained a clear intensity of emotion that all those manifestations going on about them had failed somehow to reach.

Another short, shrill blast of the toy whistle, and Gregg turned to me for a hurried hand-clasp; and the friendliness of his eyes, and his, "Well, good-by, old man!" left unsaid many things which I understood—that he thanked me for, so to speak, having given him Monica, and that he asked me to look after her a little while he was away.

The train began to move, and Gregg swung himself to the step, where he stood waving a last good-by as the train gained speed and was gone.

"It's strange," said Monica, as we made our way back through the station and across the shallow square, "my feeling as I do about Allan's going."

"How?" said I.

"My *wanting* him to go. My being glad! Shouldn't you think I'd want to keep him, that I'd want him to stay?"

"No, Monica, I shouldn't," I said. "It means more than ever now for him to go."

She gave me a quick, grateful glance.

"It's not that I want to be proud of him, though I shall be that. And it's not for France, though that, too, enters in. It's for *him*. It's the thing we spoke of that first night. And somehow the present doesn't seem to count against it at all. . . . I wish I could put it in words, but I can't."

She paused. I had never seen her face so tender or so lovely as then.

"It's like—Tagore's 'Sweet taste in the mouth of a dumb man,'" she said.

## CHAPTER XIV

**T**HERE followed then a time in which I shall always like to remember Monica. A time when she seemed to exist in a state of sustained exaltation. Yet it was unlike exaltation in that it had such poignant, such rich and vibrant, reality. No more for her that dread immateriality of things.

At last the war was real—her war. At last she was able to take sides passionately. At last she was able to see, instead of that tremendous chaotic abstraction, Frenchmen and Germans and English and Russians and Serbs. She was capable now of prejudice. At last she had achieved the blessedly smaller view.

And Paris was real, and herself, and every separate human drama going on about her. And more than all else, the future was real again. For in the year just gone, for her as for all of us, the future had been blotted out. And there had been left only two of the old three elements of time—the dim, idyllic past, and

the endless, violent present. The future had ceased to be. And it was this, the hope and the belief and the expectation, which Allan Gregg had given her back.

"Oh, I shall work!" she said. And that was the final measure of the reality he had restored.

For, on my very first visit, three days after Gregg's departure, I found her already at work joyously, in her wide-alcoved room with the north light. And already the canvas on the easel revealed the warmth and vitality of her new mood. It was amazing, how much she had done in so little time. Here was no mere beginning, to be abandoned at the first cross-current breeze of doubt, but a picture demanding completion, a bit of life that could no more stop than life itself before its fulfilment.

"Is it good, really?" she said, as I paused in the door to admire it. "I like it, myself." And then, "I've heard!" she cried, drawing me in. "I've had a letter!"

Her glance flew to a blue envelope lying on her desk.

I thought of Madame Latour.

The letter had come that morning. Of course it was forbidden to say where he was, but he had written at once upon reaching



his destination. The men in his section seemed, so far, a very good lot. Their quarters were a little uncomfortable, but he understood they had a good cook. Altogether he had nothing at all to complain of.

"Of course," said Monica, glancing down the page, "he asked after you, and said to tell you to write."

I promised myself to write at once, telling him how I had seen Monica, and how well and happy she was—for it was of that, I immediately divined, he wished to be assured.

It was the days that followed that I feared most for Monica. Days when she should miss him and when she could find no escape from the thought of his danger.

For there *was* danger. The Ambulance was never *embusqué*, if they did speak of it themselves in that way. It was only their way of saying they weren't afraid, their little touch of American brag. For under fire is under fire, in spite of the good fortune they called the "luck of the Ambulance."

But I had counted upon the old Monica, the Monica who one day had sought my help. I had counted without the new Monica, who had no longer need of my worn-out cloak of philosophy, wrapped round as she was by the shimmering mantle of love.

"Even missing him every hour, and the separation seems just a part of it all. I feel sometimes almost afraid—as if life had given too much all at once. I've never *had* any one to miss, like this, before." She looked up and laid her hand on my arm impulsively. "And you're responsible for it, Gilbert," she said.

Her generosity still included me. She thanked me, since there was no way to thank Fate.

Things occurred, small things, as it was inevitable that they should, to shed curious little side-lights upon a situation which neither of us was able to view with an outsider's eye.

There was the night, the first week, when the nice old Countess Rivat elected to speak of Gregg.

"So he has gone, your young compatriot, to help France, to carry our poor wounded soldiers," she said. "Indeed, it is very brave, and very beautiful! But monsieur was very —*sympathique*,—eh, mademoiselle?"

She turned a quick, arch look of frankest badinage upon Monica, who was taken so by surprise that she looked for a second as if she had been accused of a crime.

"Ah, I have not my eyes for nothing!" cried the countess, lifting her plump little

hand and shaking a pretty, tapering finger. "I could see it at once, that night you played."

Monica had recovered herself. "Mr. Gregg is a very old friend; we lived near together as children," she said.

"It is so long as that!" The countess fell to nodding her elaborately coiffed red head, as if she had new light upon a subject requiring her serious thought. And the result of this cogitation was so completely, so typically French that, although she had been speaking until now in English, she reverted to her own tongue for this. And perhaps she thought it gave a kind of intimacy befitting what she was going to say.

"It is a pity, you should have been married before he went to the front, my dear. In case something should happen to him, you would be protected—his property would come to the wife."

Too astonished to speak, Monica and I stared speechlessly. Who but a Frenchwoman would have said a thing like that! Who but a Frenchwoman could have discovered, by such invisible evidence as the countess had had, the existence of "property"!

Our astonishment found no vent other than, after a moment, a sudden simultaneous break of laughter.

"Ah, you may laugh!" cried the countess. "It is the way with youth; it will never be practical! But I am wise, am I not, monsieur?" She appealed to me.

"You are indeed, my dear madame," I said, "uncannily wise!"

It was afterward, when the countess had gone, that Monica faced me with an expression of actual alarm.

"It's exactly what people would think," she said, "if they knew!"

The absurdity of it struck me again, and I laughed.

"But they *would!*" Monica protested, tragically, and then herself joined an utterly helpless laugh to mine.

For she couldn't help laughing at her beautiful fact confronting us suddenly in that borrowed conventional mask.

Another day, weeks after, the mask appeared for an instant again. I had had by the morning post a letter from Gregg, my second since he had gone away. It was short, though as a matter of fact no shorter than the first, but of a different nature. It inclosed a draft for several hundred dollars, from a bank in Duluth, which he asked me to have cashed and give to Monica. He explained that he had sent the draft to Monica

first, but she had returned it, saying something about not wanting to indorse it. "There's very little chance," he wrote, "of it's being seen, but, since Monica has that feeling about it, I knew you wouldn't mind. There's no way of getting it cashed out here."

I went to the bank that morning, and took the money to Monica the same afternoon.

"What is it?" she asked, as I gave the packet into her hand.

"It's the money for a draft Allan sent me," I said.

She was thrusting the packet upon me. "I don't want it—please! I don't want it!" she said.

"But it's *for* you. Allan asked me to bring it."

"*I couldn't!*" she cut me short.

She was embarrassed and flushed, and I was suddenly more embarrassed than she. I had taken the packet from her, her gesture had been so beseeching.

"Why did he send it to you?" she said. "I thought he would understand!"

"Understand what, Monica?"

"That I wouldn't take it. I sent it back to him once."

Remembering the simplicity and frankness

of poor Gregg's letter, I could only constitute myself for the moment spokesman for him.

"But he wants you to have it; and it's right that you should. You're his wife."

If I had believed her prey to some passing feminine qualm, I was wrong. Something in her face, her very attitude, made me see that.

"I couldn't!" she echoed again. "Don't you see, I've enough for myself; there's no need of bringing this in! It could have gone on as it was, without ever speaking of it at all, if he had just understood when I made the first excuse!"

I still asked, as Gregg himself might have done, her reason why.

"I should feel as if I'd accepted it from a stranger!" she said.

Somehow it didn't seem queer to hear her speak of Gregg in that way. One could so easily see her point.

Yet I made, for Gregg's sake, one last effort at persuasion. "You accepted the stranger's love."

"And gave him mine," she said.

In the end she had her way. The money was put in the bank to Gregg's credit. She was only sorry, she said, that it had come up at all, and that I had had to know. Allan

would see as soon as she explained. He had, she knew, only meant to be generous and kind.

And I saw that it was in such ways as this that she sought to defend, against everything, the beauty and the freedom of her love.

## CHAPTER XV

**W**INTER came down upon Paris suddenly that year. Days and weeks of chill, soaking rain extinguished even the memory of the sun. The city was no longer pastel, but gray, like a fortress, grim and formidable.

Underground, in the dim arched caverns of the "Métro" stations, old women or *grands blessés, réformés*, held out their hands, like gnome grotesques, for your ticket; while the little red trains rushed through without lightening the gloom. On the street, at the entrances to the stations, the paper-women calling, in their harsh, penetrating voices, "*La Liberté! La Liberté!*" seemed like the slogan of the city itself.

But, in the great shops all was movement and brilliant light, and women, crowding until you could scarcely push your way through—buying, buying, buying, as they had never bought before; not things for themselves, but comforts to send to their men; woollen garments to keep their bodies warm, and little



extravagances to warm their hearts, and sheer luxuries to make them know how well things were going at home.

By four in the afternoons the tea-shops and cafés were thronged.

In the outlying districts lines of old men and housewives and small, shivering children stood in file, waiting for buckets of coal. Once, passing by, I recognized in one of those lines Madame Gironde, waiting her turn. Yet every day, without fail, an open coal fire burned brightly in the tiny *salon*; and in the rooms of the guests, at a certain hour every morning, Lizette appeared, with her little basket of coal, to kindle a cheery blaze.

Seeing Monica as she went about during those leaden days, oblivious of the cold and the rain and the discomfort, engaged in her ceaseless, happy activity, I thought more than once of "that city which hath no need of the sun."

The wide-alcoved room at the *pension* had seen two new canvases begun and well on their way, the finest and most heroic work she had ever attempted by far. She spent two mornings out of the week at the canteen, two afternoons at the *ouvroir* making pneumonia jackets, and had taken on new work at the *Val de Grâce*. Yet there was

always time to drop in on me at the studio to chat about her work or to tell me the latest news from Gregg. For time is the slave of happiness, as unhappiness is the slave of time.

Every day, I knew, a long letter went out to the front. I envied Gregg those letters, so filled they must have been with the flame and the ardor of life.

She was continually sending him little parcels, cakes, *pâtés*, chocolate, pipe tobacco, books, and now and then she asked me to help select something to send—something, she said, a woman wouldn't think of, that a man would like. But I was always hard put to suggest anything Monica had overlooked.

His letters came regularly, and Monica told me that he seldom wrote of his experiences, except in the most casual way. The work had been heavy of late, or particularly light, or they were ordered to move, or were *en repos* for a few days. He would speak of the charming country round about, or the weird beauty of the snow at night lighted up by a bursting star shell. And once he said he hadn't been able to sleep the previous night because the thunder of the guns had suddenly ceased. All graphic enough, and characteristically suggestive of things he had left unsaid. But of his individual human re-

actions to his fellow-men and to war, those deep experiences of the soul for which the most articulate among us may find so few words, he did not attempt to speak. Not once did he so much as mention the wounded French *poilus* he carried nightly in his ambulance. Yet it was these things which came, by the very insistence of their absence, to stand for Monica, as they stood for me, as the most eloquent of all that his letters left unsaid.

"Those are the things," said Monica, "he will tell when we see him again."

She was looking forward now to his *permission*, which would come the first week in January. They planned to spend it in Paris; they would wait until the end of his enlistment for their real honeymoon.

Meantime, she wanted, she said, to finish the two new pictures before he came in on leave, so he should see that she hadn't been idle.

She knew already which he would prefer. It would be the "Still Life," a picture with something of Gregg's own quality of reticence. It was like one of those brief final speeches of his, with everything he wished most to say left out. In the background, a suggestion of meager walls. In the foreground, a kitchen

table upon which lay, partly folded, a mud-stained uniform, the coarse-textured, faded horizon blue of the common soldier of France; and with it, as if they had all been rolled into a package together, two close-packed canvas "*musettes*," and a worn blue fatigue cap, with the little gilt insignia of the infantry pinned jauntily on in front. On the coat a dark-brown stain showed light where there had been an awkward attempt to rub it away. One sleeve, torn at the armhole, had been sewed with coarse black thread. . . . Just those few inanimate things, nothing more. Yet one saw, more plainly, indeed, than if they were there, the toil-roughened, tender hands that only a moment before had lifted the blue uniform and had not been able to trust themselves to open those canvas "*musettes*." And it was Monica's secret how she had made one so immediately aware of the absence of all those souvenirs whose usefulness had outlasted one owner's life—the musket, the steel helmet, and the canteen. "Still Life" it was, yet a picture filled with the most touching and tragic significance.

Her second picture, somewhat larger than the first, she had called "*Les Mutilés*." For myself, I could never decide between the two, which one attracted me most, for into

this she had painted also that same new quality of emotion, but of a subtler, more symbolic kind.

Here a soldier, with a wooden peg for a leg, was at work in what had once been his garden—now also *mutilé*. Beside him a single tree, left standing by the vandal's caprice, but maimed ruthlessly out of all symmetry, seemed to fling up its grotesque arms in supplication to the skies. But the color and light of this picture were the color and light of early spring. And one knew that deep in the roots of the maimed tree the sap of life was beginning to stir, and deep in the heart of the man hope lived.

I went often during those days to watch the progress of the two pictures, as they neared their completion. Something had entered into Monica's work, something that had not been there before. Her hand, perhaps, had been just as sure, but never had she worked at so high a pitch of conscious inspiration. The most commonplace things revealed themselves in new lights, turned toward her new faces of beauty.

One morning, passing that way about ten o'clock, I went in to find her in a state of tremendous elation, the studio turned upside down, and the two pictures she had been

finishing put out of the way at the far end of the room. Her easel was set out and she was cleaning her brushes when I came in.

"Oh, it's you!" She seemed surprised.

"Expecting some one?" I asked.

"My new picture," she said.

"Your new picture?"

"Yes, my dear Gilbert, I found it yesterday—ready made. All I've to do is *paint* it, and I believe I can do it, I really believe I can!"

Excitement showed in her face. Her voice took that curious vibrant tone it always had in the moments when she was most keenly alive.

Yesterday, she said, she had lunched with one of the American women from the *ouvroir*, at one of those very respectable little hotels in the Rue Balzac. "Filled with the wives of *militaires*, Englishwomen and French, and a few stray civilians. You know the kind. The last place in the world you'd expect to discover anything!"

But when they were half-way through luncheon there had come into the foyer of the hotel an old blind Frenchman with a guitar, and a little, underfed mite of a black-eyed girl with a violin. She led the old man across to a seat just outside the door of the dining-

salon, and when he was seated, and she, standing at his knee, had nestled the violin under her chin, they began, at a mutual signal, to play, on their thin, uncertain, old instruments, a gay little waltz of the year before the war.

People looked up annoyed, but, seeing those two, a smile of sympathy went round the room. An Englishwoman, passing out, laid a coin on the seat beside the old man. The child nodded gravely, and dropped the coin into the old man's pocket. Then, in the most business-like way, they made ready to play again.

"And this time," said Monica, "they played the 'Marseillaise'! I wish I could tell you what it was like. It was dreadful, at first, and pathetic. And then, somehow, all at once, it was like France herself, as if there was no one left to play it otherwise—a feeble, blind old grand-père and a little underfed girl—and 'La Marseillaise'—cracked and broken and childish, thin and meager and starved—a wavering thread to break your very heart. And they did it so bravely, with little flashes of what they meant to be spirit. . . .

"Do you see my picture now?" she said. "They're coming to sit for me—this morning. I'm going to call it '*La Marseillaise*.'"

So on that day there began the first of those sittings which resulted in the third, and to my mind the best, of those three pictures which fell, without premeditation, into a kind of definite group. It seemed afterward that no one of them would have been complete without the others, and no two of them without the third.



## CHAPTER XVI

**I**T was, I think, some time during the first week in December that Monica read me the letter from Gregg about his leave.

"Allan has a plan for shifting his *permission*," she said.

"Shifting it?" I asked.

"I'll read what he says."

She went to the desk and got the letter, and read me the part about the plan. He said he had discovered that he might shift his *permission* to the end of his enlistment, which would mean, instead of coming in for a few days in January, with separation again until March, when his enlistment expired, that he could, if he liked, stay on, and come in that much earlier in the end, about the eighteenth of February. It made a difference of only about six weeks longer to wait, and then he would be in for good. They could go then, say, to the Riviera, and stay as long as they liked.

"I'll do whatever you say," he wrote, "but

I hate to think of coming back here again, once I've gone in."

"Of course he does!" said Monica, "and so do I. But I'd planned so, and looked forward so, I can't help being terribly disappointed. And I know I shouldn't be. If Allan, out there, can be so reasonable about it—and of course he's perfectly right—I certainly ought to be."

I think it was just that extreme reasonableness of Gregg's plan which kept me from seeing at first what Monica herself presently pointed out to me, that her disappointment was, after all, evidence of no greater feeling than his dread of another separation. And so, to be sure, it was. It had been again that curious, unexpected lucidity of his mental processes that had obscured for me his emotion.

Monica's disappointment was soon gone, like a shadow put to rout by the sun. Her thought and expectation lengthened themselves to meet the time when he should really return.

And she wrote, saying that she thought it best, by all means, to stay; that she was glad he had thought of the plan; and the Riviera was perfect in February.

"It will give me time to finish the new picture," she said. And to this end she had

the old man and the child come every day for a sitting, at a certain hour, and adjusted her other work to the new régime.

In January there set in a season of bitter cold. Gregg wrote of frozen bread, of no heat in the barracks, of the almost unendurable cold when they were driving at night, without wind-shields or lights, against the icy wind. But never a word of complaint. Monica worried about him then as I had never seen her do before. He wrote that they were busier than they had ever been—on the go all night long. He would enjoy being really warm again, when he came in. Monica sent out cold remedies, Japanese hand-warmers, a new fur-lined helmet—exhausted her ingenuity in her effort to keep him well. Pneumonia cases crowded the hospitals as if there had been an offensive. The wonder was that any man could endure such exposure and live. It was more to be feared than the enemy's guns, for it was everywhere, inescapable, and there was no way to fight back.

How Gregg, frail as he was and unaccustomed to hardships, withstood those terrible weeks seemed a mystery even to me. A mystery explainable only on the ground that he was sustained by the thought of Monica.

And through Monica's anxiety there ran a high note of pride, pride in his strength, pride in his lack of complaint, pride in the thought of his service in a time of so great need.

It lent to her own work a kind of urgent fervor, which accomplished marvels as the weeks went by.

The first two pictures were finished and laid aside. She would complete "*La Marseillaise*," if all went well, by the time of Gregg's return.

And now they were planning their holiday, in the south, in the sun. She was to go down from Paris and meet him at Cannes; and they would explore the "*Côte d'Azur*" together until they found the spot they liked best. I offered them my little bandbox of a place at Cagnes, where I had, until the beginning of the war, spent a month at least every year. But they thought they had best not attempt a house of their own; they wanted to be free to move about, and, considering everything, hotels would probably suit them best.

On the 3rd of that February the United States government had presented passports to the German ambassador at Washington and declared diplomatic relations with Germany at an end.

The news had spread through Paris on the 4th, which was Sunday, and by afternoon the down-town hotels buzzed with Americans—philanthropists, financiers, business men, expatriate residents of Paris—with serious, excited faces—toasting America, the war, the Allies, laying wagers as to how soon we would get an army across.

Smartly dressed lady buyers from New York sat together all afternoon over their *thé complet* and cigarettes, and discussed in frightened voices the possibility of getting home by way of Spain, and waited nervously for cablegrams of instruction from their firms.

Everywhere Frenchmen with whom one had had only a bowing acquaintance rose from their tables to come and shake hands and welcome us as if we had just arrived.

“*Enfin*, we are allies!” they said.

At the Continental, where the men of the Ambulance forgathered, those who were in on leave and those whose time had expired stood in knots in the lobby, enthusiastic over the possibility of taking the first boat home to enlist. They supposed, of course, some arrangements would be made.

There had been the same handshaking and welcoming at the front, it seemed; and some of the fellows in the section had talked of

getting themselves released and going home to enlist. "Excitement," wrote Gregg. And he had added that if they wanted to be in the fight, they had best stay where they were for a while. Then he had spoken as usual of their plans for the Riviera, and Monica had been wise enough to accept her present without any dark forecastings of the future.

As always, Gregg had seen clear. There followed the long wait; but that Sunday had been the call, the summons to each of us to put his house in order, to hold himself in readiness for what was to come.

For myself, who had so little to put in order, there was not much to do besides wait. I had written at once to men I knew in the service in Washington, registering my qualifications and putting myself at their disposal. Meantime there was no reason to desert the various small niches I already filled—a relief committee here, a few hours' service there, another committee, and so through the list.

And I had work to complete. I had promised two large posters, war posters, before April 1st. So far they were little more than sketches. If I did nothing else, I should finish them. It was good just then to have definite work expected of one.

As the time drew near for her going I saw

less and less of Monica. Every spare moment of the day was given over to shopping.

I met her one day with Alice Germaine, just coming out of a shop.

"I'm sure Monica has a rendezvous in the south!" said Alice. "She's buying such scandalously pretty things."

With a laugh out of the corner of her eye for me, Monica gave the inevitable woman's reply: "Heaven knows I needed *something*. I haven't a single thing!"

"Nevertheless . . ." said Alice, leaving her point in the air.

But it was only the merest teasing. Neither Alice Germaine nor any one else had an idea of the truth—not even the faintest suspicion. The amazing amount of work Monica had accomplished that winter had been proof of her absorption, of her undivided interest!

On the day of her departure, caught in the last-minute feminine rush, she had only time to telephone her good-by.

A letter came back to me, after a few days, with the Cannes postmark, but written during the last hours of her journey.

It was so glowing a thing—her words, her phrases, like so many lighted tapers! How alive she was then! How unconscious of fear. Going down the sunlit current of life so swift-

ly, so surely, so exaltedly, to the goal of her happiness! It was worth all the suffering the gods could devise, for one hour like that. And, reading the letter, I could almost have believed that Monica was in love with me, so ardently did her thoughts, written, one could see, very fast, flow out, so fully did her spirit expand. But well I knew with whom she was in love. And I envied him still more the letters he must have had all those months from her.



## CHAPTER XVII

THE bitter cold continued, and March brought no abatement. Everywhere it was the same cry—no coal! no coal! I envied Gregg and Monica those days idling under the warm Mediterranean sun.

Old Thérèse, my good maid of all work, kept a fire in my grate as long as it was humanly possible; but it grew smaller and smaller, until its meagerness was colder than no fire at all. And every one suffered alike. The mistresses of fashionable *salons* set little lace and satin floor cushions before each chair, and guests slipped their freezing feet under the cushions to find a comfortably heated stone. A charming idea, almost repaying one for the cold, and typically Parisian; but hardly practicable for work. I tried working with my overcoat on, and Thérèse shook her head in dismay and brought me endless quantities of hot tea. But hot tea was cold tea in the studio before I had finished the cup.

I should have gone then to Madame Gi-

ronde's, but Madame Gironde told me reluctantly that she could only promise one fire a day, in the mornings. There was always the fire in the *salon*, where one might go and sit. But I could hardly work in the *salon*, so I gave up Madame Gironde's. And work was impossible in a hotel, even if I had found one with anything better to offer in the way of heat.

In the end a cold fastened itself upon me; a cold which yielded to no amount of ministrations. Something had to be done. My posters would never be finished at this rate.

I began to think of my little place at Cagnes. There, at least, I should be warm and comfortable, and free to go on with my work. And suddenly, one morning, my decision was made. A decision which was to lead me eventually again into the lives of Monica and Allan Gregg.

Within two days I had got together the few things I should need, locked the door of the studio in the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, and had started upon that southward journey which seemed never to lie through country at all, but through February, and March, and April, and May, into June at the end.

The train reached Cagnes at noon, and as I had had an early lunch in the

*buffet*, I went at once in search of the old couple who had the keys to my house and who had served me for years as cook, gardener, and faithful friends.

As I walked through the peaceful, tree-bordered streets, the sunshine weighted with the scent of yellow mimosa, I wondered if Cagnes could really have heard of the war. It seemed, in that beautiful, quiet spot, so like an impossibly evil dream, so unreal and remote.

Arriving at the cottage, I was struck by the absence of familiar flowers in the little garden, flowers that had garnished my solitary table every season for years. The door of the cottage was closed, and I went up the path and knocked. No one answered. I called. Again no answer. I went round to the kitchen door. It also was closed. I tried the latch. It was locked. I came round to the front again, and a woman with a market-basket on her arm was going by. I called to her and asked if she could tell me where I should find Pierre Michaud and his wife.

"Pierre Michaud?" she said, resting her basket on one hip, "Pierre Michaud is dead."

I had been going toward her along the path, and I stopped.

"Dead! . . . Pierre . . . ?"

Had I not heard? "It was a long time now—since the first of last September. They had had news one day that their boy, Gustave, was killed at Verdun—and within a month, monsieur, they, too, are gone. Pierre Michaud first, and then the wife."

"She, too—dead!"

"She, also, monsieur. Perhaps it was old age, perhaps—a malady of the heart. Who knows?" She spoke simply, as if she related a commonplace; and then, seeing me silent, "*C'est la guerre, n'est-ce pas, monsieur?*" she said.

She waited, I suppose, for me to speak, and after a moment walked on, with a polite, "*Bon jour, monsieur,*" and a nod for my belated thanks, wondering why I should be so affected by the death of Pierre Michaud and his wife.

I lingered a quarter of an hour about the forlorn little garden and the deserted cottage, not wanting, somehow, to leave them alone. And then, promising them to stop on my way back again, I took my way up the hill toward my own tiny house, a good ten minutes' climb.

And I had wondered if Cagnes could really have heard of the war!

How much the old couple had been part

of my life and my house there on the hill I came within the next few hours to realize. For I spent the afternoon in an utterly vain attempt to recapture the old charm. Other years I had written ahead, and Pierre and his wife had been there to welcome me royally with smiles and a hundred delightful attentions, the house gay with flowers through the open door, the table laid and my favorite chair drawn up, fresh white curtains at the windows, freshly sunned linen on my bed, and always a little surprise in the way of an embroidered centerpiece, or a bit of carpentering Pierre had devised.

To-day I had not even the keys, but managed without much trouble to force a way in through a faulty window. Inside, the stale, chill odor of long-closed houses assailed me. The bare furniture stood against the walls in the scrupulous order in which it had been left. I threw open the windows, pulled the chairs out into the room, unlocked the front door from the inside, threw it open, too, and stood looking out. Something seemed even gone from the view, the view which had never before failed of its thrill. It was the presence of those two kindly old souls, who had with their homely magic wakened my house every season out of its year-long sleep. And now

that they were gone, the house also seemed to have died. I went out and sought my favorite sunny walk to shake myself free of the idea. But I forgot to see about me, forgot to look at the view. I was thinking of Pierre Michaud and his wife, and their son Gustave, *mort pour la patrie*, and of the war. And I found myself back at the house again. I went in and opened the door of my bedroom. The mattress, with the pillows inside, was rolled back on the bed and covered with a rug. I had intended to take out the mattress and let it lie on the grass in the sun, and to do what I could to make the house habitable before night. But, instead, I went out of the room, closed all the windows again, and locked up the house as I had found it, and went down the hill, decided to stay at the hotel until I should find some one to take the place of Pierre Michaud and his wife.

I paused a moment, as I had promised, at the cottage at the foot of the hill, to bid it and the sad little garden good night.

At the hotel the proprietor, whom I had known for years, promised to do what he could toward finding a suitable pair to look after my wants. Though I would never, he admitted, find another like Pierre Michaud

and his wife. Still, we should see. His cook had an uncle who had a wife. Perhaps they could come. Meanwhile he would make me comfortable in his very best room.

But the next day the cook's uncle, who had been sent for, did not materialize. The old men, they said, were doing the young men's work, and the old women were doing the work the old men had done. I began to see that finding any one at all might be difficult.

On the morning of my second day letters, forwarded from Paris, were brought up on the tray with my coffee and rolls; and among them a letter from Gregg, addressed directly to San Sylvestre.

I had dropped them a note on the day I had made my decision to come, telling them of my plans.

Gregg wrote that they had just received my letter. They had found "exactly the place"—a charming hotel above Beaulieu, with surroundings perfectly to their taste, and had settled there for a stay.

"I am writing immediately," he said, "because we want you to come here for a few days with us before you begin to work. You are too close to refuse, so we shall expect you within the next two or three days. Don't bother to let us know. Take the Hôtel

Beau Soleil bus from the station. We are sure to be in, or only gone for a short walk." Monica had scribbled at the bottom of the page: "You have your orders. Do come."

By the time I had finished my breakfast I had made up my mind to go. It would be an excellent way to pass the time until the proprietor should look up some one to care for my house. He was sure, he said, to discover somebody within a few days.

I gave him instructions to have the house opened and put in running order, and he was to notify me by card at once.

That done, I packed my bag and caught the half-past-twelve train.

By mid-afternoon I descended to the station platform at Beaulieu, and discovered the automobile bus and the middle-aged uniformed driver of the Grand Hôtel Beau Soleil.

I was his only passenger, and when he had put my bag in beside me, and had mounted his seat, we began our gradual upward climb away from the sea, through Beaulieu, almost deserted now in the very height of the season; past two great hotels, once the scenes of fashionable gaiety, now closed and boarded up; past smaller hotels with huge signs painted across the front, with just a touch



of brag, "OUVERT TOUTE L'ANNÉE," and here a few, a very few people went in and out. Upward past extravagantly ornate villas, secluded behind great walls, with glimpses of rare exotic gardens through the elaborately wrought iron gates, and no sign of life anywhere to be seen; past lovely white villas asleep in the sun, with wide, brilliant gardens—yellow and pink and lavender, and flaming points of purple and scarlet, inclosed in delicate white balustrades festooned with roses.

Stage pictures, with impossibly brilliant flowers, impossibly fleecy clouds in the blue sky, and an impossibly blue bay spread out below. But stage pictures with the actors all away. Even the few people one did pass had the air of being supernumeraries, of waiting for the principals to return.

The Beau Soleil lay above and beyond all this, on an eminence of its own. It was not at all one of the big modern hostelries—trust Gregg for that; but a very old Italian villa, set in the midst of its formal Italian gardens terraced and graveled down to the ancient and mellowed stone wall which made a square round the foot of the hill. The summer estate, two hundred years ago, of the Comte Giordano di Crespi, as attested by the al-

most obliterated name and date on a small copper plate let into the stone arch of the gate by which we entered the direct approach—a narrow avenue which followed the wall between rows of nobly aged spruce, where the years of fallen leaves and deep shade had laid a carpet as rich and soft as velvet over the stony ascent.

The entrance to the villa, now the Grand Hôtel Beau Soleil, lay on the farther side, to which the drive swept in grandly through a less formal and surprisingly level park, giving the grounds on that side the effect of a tableland.

The doors of the hotel stood hospitably open, with an alluring glimpse through opposite doors of the terraced gardens I had seen from below.

No one was about. The driver climbed down from his seat, said, "*Voilà, m'sieu!*" took my bag, and I followed him in. The clerk, drowsing at his desk in the little railed-in office, woke with a start, and informed me that Monsieur and Madame Gregg had gone out, but would be back presently, and meantime would I care to wait in the garden, perhaps? or here, if I liked.

I chose to wait in the garden.

How the Grand Hôtel Beau Soleil had es-

caped fame I do not know. Nor how Comte Giordano di Crespi had managed to make it so inconspicuous. For it did not flaunt its beauty as those others did below, and fashion had passed it by. Yet here was surely a garden to rival any of theirs, a veritable Old World garden, mellowed, reserved, exquisite.

As I descended the first of those beautiful terraces I found myself prey to a lurking fear that the comte himself, or his lady, might come out and ask me why I was there—a fear that subsequent familiarity never quite overcame, for I had always in that garden the feeling of a guest not quite properly invited, and never suitably dressed.

It was both stately and intimate. The trees were of rarest varieties, beautifully kept and green. Blue and white iris bordered the straight, graveled walks, from which, on each terrace, ran little brown earth paths to secluded retreats and bowers. Statues, dear to the Italian heart, gleamed whitely from out the green, and little stone fauns looked up startled where they had lain startled for two hundred years in the grass. On the second terrace, precisely in the center, stood a kind of elaborate grotto, made entirely of curious shells cemented together in swirling rococo

patterns, built to commemorate some important date in the life of the Comte di Crespi, as recorded in Latin on a long stone over the door, together with the illustrious name of the designer. The rhythmical drip of a drinking-fountain came from inside.

Farther down, I came upon two ladies, both in black, with black lace hats, lying in garden chairs, reading books. Guests, no doubt, of the hotel. And as I strolled leisurely on to the foot of the garden I heard several times a faint murmur of voices from hidden leafy retreats. But they did not disturb the solitude—only added somehow to its charm.

I had reached the old wall, and stood leaning my elbows upon it and dreaming. It was a place for dreams—a place for dreams and romance.

I had remained in that position for ten minutes or more when I heard a sound behind me and turned.

Monica and Gregg were coming toward me down the straight, graveled walk.

What struck me first was that Gregg was not in uniform, as I had seen him last and as I had expected to see him to-day.

He had gone back to the old combination of neutral gray suit and brilliant tie; and I experienced again, redoubled, that curious

shock of surprise I had felt that first day in Paris, to see him so exactly as he had been years before in New York, repeating to the last detail every impression I had had of him then. It was not until a moment later, when I heard again the quiet voice and felt the pressure of that cool, gentle hand, that I realized that this time, at least, I had really expected to find him changed. And I had again to remind myself that it was not by such outward signs that one becomes aware of change in a man.

Monica, in violet linen and a wide garden hat, made a charming bit of color, yet she was for me, in that first moment, only a background for Gregg.

Discovering me, they quickened their pace and ran down the steps of the last terrace, Monica calling her greeting, and the friendliness of Gregg's smile sufficing for his.

"So you've really come!" cried Monica, shaking one of my hands while I held out my other to Gregg.

"To be sure," said Gregg. It was then I had my final vivid impression. "Why shouldn't he come?"

"Didn't you expect me?" I asked Monica.

"I knew how you loved Cagnes," she said.

I explained about Pierre Michaud and his wife, and that I had taken advantage of the delay to accept their invitation, which had arrived at the psychological moment.

"Poor old people! What a tragedy!" said Monica, thinking of those two who had died.

It occurred to me that Gregg must have had enough, in the last few months, of tragedy. At any rate, he turned it off by saying that, however it was, he was glad I had been able to come.

It was astonishing how well he looked. Not quite so robust, perhaps, as the day he had left Paris for the front; but that had been the effect of the uniform. And paler, too—but that was the vivid tie. To every outward appearance he was the same Allan Gregg I had met that first night in New York.

"So you've come through without a scratch," I said, "and looking remarkably well."

"Doesn't he!" said Monica.

Gregg only smiled. "There wasn't much danger," he said.

"He's very modest," said Monica, her eyes resting upon her husband's face with what seemed to me a strange expression.

It was in the pause which followed—they were standing a little apart from me now—

that I seemed to become aware that if Gregg had remained unchanged, some curious, subtle difference had come upon Monica.

What it was, or how to define it, I did not know—a new element added, or an old element taken away. I perceived that she, too, was not, in some way, as I had looked forward to finding her.

When I had seen her last the tides of life were high and strong within her, and I had thought to find them higher still. And now—it was not as if they had ebbed, but as if, instead, they had encountered, on the turn, some strange, conflicting current, deep and invisible and uncharted.

Two things were clear to me: that she desired passionately, whatever it was, to keep it concealed; and that she had succeeded, for certainly Gregg had not seen.

Contentment was in every line of his face.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**I**T was I who broke the pause, in reality no more than a few seconds long, with some remark about the beauty of the spot they had found.

Monica was enthusiastic. "It's perfect, isn't it? Allan found it," she said.

"Perfect for a honeymoon," said I, and was amazed to see Monica, who had been so frank and unself-conscious about her love, flush a slow pink like a bride.

It was Gregg who answered my reference to their honeymoon, and if his answer consisted merely of the one word, "Yes," he filled it out characteristically by the glance of admiration and content he sent round the garden.

I wondered if he had not noticed Monica's flush. Had the one great fact of her love obscured for him all other considerations? For her love was even more apparent than it had been before. She could not keep it out of her eyes when she looked at him, and she



could not keep her slightest accidental touch of his hand or his sleeve from seeming a caress. Why, I wondered, had the idea occurred to me negatively, in that way? Was it because I had thought she was trying to keep it out? Before, during those first days in Paris, I had seen the love in her eyes, had noted the caress of her touch, but I had not thought of it negatively, as now.

"You look tired, Gilbert," she said, and, always solicitous for every one's comfort, suggested that we go in and have tea.

So we walked back together, the three of us, up the iris-bordered walk that led to the hotel.

I said I supposed he was glad to be back, and he said, "Oh yes! Yes, indeed!" I said he must have suffered a great deal from the cold, and he said that every one suffered, but that he had fared as well as any, for, aside from the discomfort, it had had no other effect upon him than a slight case of sore throat. His reticence and modesty again. Monica added nothing; did not help him out, as she had used to do. She walked beside us, listening silently, like an old - fashioned wife taking second place in the conversation. Was it real, or did I only imagine the faintest possible embarrassment in her manner, her silence?

At the door Gregg left us to go and order the tea, and we stood looking back in the direction we had just come.

"How beautiful this is!" I exclaimed, struck anew by the exquisite peace of that garden in the long shadows of the late afternoon.

"Almost *too* beautiful," said Monica.

I think she said it against her will, or involuntarily, perhaps; for she followed it immediately with a bantering remark and her old, quick smile.

But I remembered suddenly the day in the Panthéon when she had called de Chavannes's murals "too perfect." There may have been no connection whatever between them; it was, of course, the most obvious association of ideas. And none of these things I was noticing, or imagining, had for a moment diminished the spontaneity or the actual gaiety of her welcome. I had sensed merely the presence of an undercurrent; on the surface the sunlight still danced.

Gregg returned, and we took the lift up to their sitting-room, an old - fashioned, high-ceilinged square room, in the center of the suite, with French windows and a shallow balcony overlooking the garden, the valley, Beaulieu, and the sea, bringing them into a

new and delightful perspective. The furnishings, part very old, part added for convenience during the last decade, composed a period and harmony of their own—the period of old villas made into hotels by regretful and kindly hands.

There were hangings of old damask, silver blue, with a tracery of little faded wreaths. By the reading-table stood a beautifully carved *chaise-longue*, upholstered in yellow, the dominant note of that wide, tranquil room. The *chaise-longue*, Monica said, was "Allan's special place."

"I like it for reading," he said. There were books on the table, books underneath, and on the mantel—Tauchnitz and Nelson editions, and new American books with the advertising covers still on, these last mostly books on the war.

Monica had taken off her hat and was arranging the tea-things. Gregg offered me the *chaise-longue*, but I preferred to be near the window, so he made himself comfortable in his "special place," took out his straight-stemmed brier pipe, and began to fill it.

Watching him, I wondered if the war had had so devastating an effect upon his spirit that he could not bear to speak of it—for he had left it to me, each time, to bring it

up. And each time I had had the response of his brief, suddenly conclusive answers which seemed to leave him abruptly stranded, with nothing more to say. But there could be naturally no leaving it out; and I determined this time to bring out my question direct.

"Tell me," I said, "what did you get out of your experience? What has been your reaction toward it all?"

He answered at once. "I get out of it," he said, "that the Allies are a long way from victory yet. They're depending on us to come in."

He had misunderstood.

"Personally, I meant. Your own reactions—experiences."

I saw Monica leaning a little forward in her chair, her eyes upon Gregg as a woman who loves might watch for a tender word.

"Personally," he said—"well, it was about as I thought it would be, as you read of it, you know, in books. There were some things, of course, I didn't expect; the cold, for instance, and certain noises you can't imagine until you've heard."

"But," I pressed him, determined now to make him speak, "did you find it horrible—or beautiful—or what?"

"Well," he seemed to consider a moment, "you could call it both, I suppose."

He sat there quite willing and ready to answer any more questions I was going to ask, calmly, in his yellow *chaise-longue*, tamping the coals of his pipe lightly with the tip of his finger.

But I asked no more. What, after all, was there to ask?

Monica had risen and moved across the room in quest of something which, apparently, she did not find. Following her with my eyes, I caught a glimpse of an easel protruding from behind a screen in the farthest corner, with a canvas, face to the wall, and covered.

"You're working!" I said, glad to find something upon which to turn the conversation.

She paused on her way back to the tea-table. "It's nothing," she said; "just an idea I had the first week we were here—not worth working out."

"It's a *good* idea," said Gregg, from his *chaise-longue*, "if she had gone on with it as she began. Wouldn't you think," he said, turning to me and making one of his swift, floating gestures toward the garden with his slender hand, "that this would be an ideal place to paint?"

The thought had been so present in my own mind that I said I certainly thought it would.

"Monica thought so at first. Now she says she can't work here at all."

I must have made some movement away from the window where I had been standing, for Monica spoke hurriedly, moving out as if she would intercept me.

"Please!" she said. "It's dreadful!"

"What happened?" I asked.

"It just wouldn't work out, that's all. You know how they won't sometimes."

There was a tap at the door, and a servant brought in the tea. I could see that Monica was glad of the interruption. She was pretending that it was of no consequence, but I knew that the picture, whatever it might be, had caused her keen disappointment. She would have preferred not speaking of it at all. But when the servant had gone out, Gregg went on as if there had been no interruption, as if he thought we two together might change her view.

"When you have your technique, as Monica has—when you know how to paint—it seems to me the idea would be the hard thing to get. I liked it," he said.

"What was the idea?" I asked.

"Tell him, Monica."

And Monica, deciding, I think, that it would be simpler to tell than refuse, told while she gave us our tea. But in spite of that physical distraction, she did not manage to make it casual.

"You know the valley of the Rhône," she said, "on the way down from Paris, how lovely it is. Well, it was in the last hours of my journey down. I was sitting by the window, looking across the valley to the line of hills on the other side. . . . You remember how every few miles those hills are terraced down in gray white stone, from the very top to the floor of the valley—vineyards, I think. . . . The air so clear, the green valley so peaceful, and the terraces standing out so white in the sun—they seemed like great flights of steps, such as gods might come down! And all at once a phrase came into my head—it's somewhere in the Bible, I think—"The feet of those upon the mountains." . . . And that was what my picture was going to be. Dawn, or evening—one of the changing hours; the valley, with the little farms, and a kind of heroic, symbolic figure descending the steps. . . ."

She had put down her cup, freeing her eager, eloquent hands, and the old vibrant

quality had come into her voice, for she was seeing, in the retelling, that first beautiful vision again. And now, ignoring my exclamation that it was exquisite, she dropped her hands abruptly again to her cup.

"It was so clear to me then," she said. "Even after I had begun work on it I could see it finished, complete. Then it began to elude me. I couldn't make it materialize; I couldn't bring it to life."

"You will!" I said. "You're only discouraged now."

Smiling, she shook her head. "It's hopeless. Look at it; you'll see."

She had, for no reason unless it was to prove to me once and for all how hopeless it was, changed her mind about letting me see.

I went over, set aside the screen, and turned the easel about. I knew her methods of work well enough to read what I saw—the history of the struggle and death of a brave inspiration. Traceable still the first sure strokes of her outlines, up to the very moment, almost, when they also had encountered the baffling force of that opposing mysterious current, had wavered before it, and finally failed.

It was hopeless; she was right about that. And I knew her need well enough to indulge



in no friendly and obvious criticism, no half-hearted praise. It was courage to abandon it she had needed, so that she might begin again. A courage she had never lacked before. For here she had gone on long after her inspiration had died, driven day after day by the sheer force of her will.

"Abandon this," I said. "Begin it all over again."

"No, it's beyond me," she said.

I thought suddenly of the letter that had come back to me in Paris, written in those last hours of her journey down; that very hour, perhaps, looking up from her page and across to those terraced hills, the idea for the picture had come to her. Nothing had been beyond her then! No inspiration too high or too bold.

"But it isn't beyond you," I said. "And it's wrong to waste an inspiration like that."

"I knew you would like it," said Gregg.

But Monica only laughed at us both, and begged me to come and drink my tea before it was cold.

## CHAPTER XIX

**A**T the end of four days I wrote to the proprietor of the hotel at Cagnes, from whom I had heard nothing, to say that if he had found no one to look after my house, he need search no further. I would stay on at Beaulieu instead. And I gave him the necessary instructions for forwarding my things.

Many elements had contributed to the making of this decision, but if I were asked to write them down, I should find it difficult to do.

From the first Gregg and Monica had pressed me to give up the idea of San Sylvestre and content myself to stay on at the Beau Soleil. They argued that all my time would be spent in adjusting the new servants to my ways, or my ways to them; that my work would never be done; that I could have my things over in a day and be at work at once, in comfort; I myself had said the Beau Soleil was an inspiring place. Their company ought to be some inducement, they said.

All good arguments enough, but not any of them, or all of them together, would have held me without the presence of something else, some other reason which I could hardly formulate to myself. It had to do with my daily increasing sense of responsibility for the happiness of those two; the sense that I must, even at the risk of seeming to intrude upon their honeymoon, stand by. Stand by for what, I did not know. It was much too definite an expression for what I felt, yet I remember that it was "stand by" which did, on the very day I decided to stay, come into my mind.

I had been with them a great deal of those four days, and during that time I had come more and more to wonder how Gregg, who loved her, could be so blind. For Monica's exaltation, sustained through the long winter of their separation by the thought of this time when they should be together again, was gone. And in its place was a kind of ceaseless urgent question—a question to which she seemed forever waiting a reply. Was it possible that he could not see?

Day after day I watched him, lying on his yellow *chaise-longue*, reading his interminable books; scarcely looking up or moving, except to light his pipe, for hours at a time.

And Monica watched him, too. Watched while he read, conscientiously, impartially, those first books written by the young Americans of the Ambulance, who sought so naïvely and so ardently, through their day-by-day reminiscences, to express to their countrymen how those nightly errands of mercy under enemy fire had become for them adventures into the unexplored regions of the soul. Watched him, and waited for his comment, which never came; except, perhaps, to say that the book was well or badly written, that this incident was true or that incident overdrawn. Yet what, I continually asked myself, in Heaven's name did we expect him to say? It was hardly to be expected that a man of Gregg's temperament would turn voluble overnight!

And he was never actually averse to talking about the war. He discussed the news almost every night after dinner with a retired English major, who, with his wife and a Mr. St. John, made up the only English-speaking people, besides ourselves, at the hotel. The old major admired Gregg tremendously, particularly sought him out, and he took the first occasion to say to me that he considered my young friend a

very admirable type of American, "straight-forward, no words, knows what he knows."

Gregg had, as a matter of fact, more accurate knowledge of the history and politics of Europe than the old major himself, whose memories, now that he had nothing to do but remember, were beginning to blur a little. Gregg's figures and dates were almost infallible, since he never forgot what he read, and he had read, it seemed, everything; and this in a man so young pleased the major and admitted Gregg at once to his comradeship and respect. He talked to Gregg as if they were old veterans together, asked him questions about conditions at the front, which Gregg answered with his usual conclusive simplicity. Those conversations of theirs, which always began on their way out of the dining-room after dinner with the major's "Well, I see they've battered in a bit at —," and continued for the few minutes they stood waiting for Mrs. Brooks and Monica, took the form of a brief laconic exchange of the particular kind of military detail for which I have never had any head, and which since childhood has filled me with a kind of awe, tempered by the suspicion that it may not all be quite so accurate or so difficult as it sounds. Detached, impersonal,

as if they spoke of something very far off, reminding me always of conversations I had heard in my youth between old soldiers of the Civil War, veterans whose fires had long burned out, whose ardors were reduced now to mere love of statistics.

Natural enough for the old major, of course. But Gregg was not old. He was young. Where then were the ardors and fires that belonged to his youth? He had been out there in the midst of it, at the battle-front; had lifted dying men, heard their farewells intended for other ears than his, had carried them night after night in his ambulance, blinded, crazed, horribly maimed, men flung back upon life, discarded even by death. Had he so soon been able to reduce all this to figures and facts, to positions, calculations, cold losses and gains?

Was I beginning to lose that sense of the things he left unsaid? Had I begun to discern the course of that strange undercurrent whose presence I had felt in Monica on the day of my arrival?

## CHAPTER XX

**T**HE Grand Hôtel Beau Soleil could hardly, in spite of its beauty, have been said to be gay. There was the typical war-time group, but with every trace of the military curiously left out. Not a single uniform to be seen down those stately walks, not a soldier resting on leave. Only queer, stray civilians from the provinces; old people with hidden maladies, who had outlived their sons; feminine remnants of families broken up by the war, and that most pathetic of all pairs, the childless old couple who have had nothing to give to France. One strikingly tall old lady, so feeble that she had to be led about, her hat and shawl taken on and off, and her food cut for her at table, had a way of fixing you with her dimming red-rimmed eyes, as if trying desperately to hold you as one of the fast-retreating realities of this world. She, it was safe to say, had not heard of the war.

And all this old age might at another time

have made one feel very young, but now only made one sad. And all this peace and sunshine and quiet might at another time have made one forget the rest of the world, but now only heightened the contrast. There all was youth and storm and violence; here all was age and silence and fading away.

Both Major Brooks, who was past his prime—fifty-eight or nine, I should say, though he still wore his tweeds with a soldierly air—and Mr. St. John, who was one of those tall, smooth-shaven English bachelors of no age at all, but who referred to himself as “an old fellow like me,” made sooner or later an opportunity to tell me, as they had told Gregg, why they were there. They seemed to feel, both of them, some sort of apology necessary for their presence on the Riviera. And with both the reason was physical. The major had been retired from service several years before, on account of some trouble growing out of an old wound from which, it appeared, he had never fully recovered.

“Oh, I look right enough, and I *am*; only—I’m no good to England!” he said.

With St. John, the trouble lay in his back, which kept him in a state of semi-invalidism, special foods, early hours, and a great deal of care as to over-exertion. He had been com-



pelled to live away from England on account of the climate, for years; but he had gone back three times since the beginning of the war to offer his services, and had been rejected each time, even for home clerical posts.

"So the least I can do," he said, "is keep out of the way." One would never have suspected St. John of being an invalid. He was so amiable, so alert; and he had the look of a rather distinguished man of affairs.

We were thrown, we three Americans and three English, a good deal into one another's company. We were, I think, looked upon a little as interlopers. Perhaps those old French people had been coming to the Beau Soleil every winter for years, and saw in us the beginning of encroaching tourists. Monica had, I discovered, a speaking acquaintance with most of them, and whenever she passed with her friendly nod they followed her with wistful, almost wondering smiles for her fresh, glowing vigor and youth. But they looked a little askance at Mrs. Brooks, a handsome gray-haired woman, with a sharp, clever tongue and sharper eyes, who wore heavy boots and tramped tirelessly over the hills all afternoon and came to dinner every night punctiliously dressed, fresh flowers at her corsage, and diamond rings on both hands.

The major and Mrs. Brooks looked a little askance at Mr. St. John, generally, I believe, because he was their countryman, and they felt privileged, and specifically because he had accomplished so little; poor by his own efforts, they seemed to think. It was understood that he wrote blank-verse tragedies, though for whom or for what they didn't know. It was clear they thought him the saddest of failures. They liked him, they said, but they did find him pathetic. Gregg agreed with them, but Monica said, on the contrary, she thought St. John was very happy and quite to be envied. Gregg said that a man could hardly be happy who had so little in life—that he seemed to have tried a great many things and failed.

“But the trying was something!” said Monica.

Poor St. John himself looked askance at nothing except modern literature, and that, he was persuaded, was not worth looking at at all. He had, however, two great exceptions—Oscar Wilde and Emerson! “Your Emerson,” he always called him, when speaking to us.

He was always looking over the financial page of the papers, which, with his distinguished appearance, gave an impression of his

being connected with high finance or extensively interested in stocks and bonds. But in reality, as he himself one day quite simply explained, he was only watching the foreign exchange reports, looking out a place he might go next season where his few English pounds would exchange to the best advantage and the climate was right. He was really an exceedingly likable fellow, St. John.

Directly after dinner every night all the old French couples went off to their rooms, and it appeared that before my arrival there had been an hour or two of bridge every evening in the *salon*. The major and Mrs. Brooks, and Monica and Gregg. St. John never played. He couldn't, somehow, take cards seriously enough, he said.

Monica begged of me the first night to take her place. She liked cards now and then, she said, but not every night; but she hadn't liked to break up the game. It had been that deadly ceremonial routine against which she had rebelled; so, when she had made me see that, I willingly took her place, though I played indifferently myself. But there are sacred rights inherent in bridge, rights which no mere human has the temerity to invade.

Major Brooks and his wife played brill-

iantly, enjoying the game. Gregg played quietly, never saying a word, leaning back in his chair, and giving, one would have said, but the most casual attention to the others' play, but winning consistently, scientifically, easily. Never a moment's hesitation of those gentle hands over the selection of his card.

I could never decide whether he was fond of the game, or indifferent to it, or whether he played entirely for accommodation. At any rate, he played. Every night the un-failing routine; after the little exchange with the major, in which St. John and I sometimes took part, but more often went off on purely speculative tangents of our own, they began to move toward the table in the corner of the *salon*, as if drawn thither by the enthusiastic way in which Mrs. Brooks was already laying out the cards. Reaching the table, they would all three look about for me and ask if I was coming—a little rite I always allowed them to perform, preserving in that way the illusion, if not the reality, of acting upon my own will, giving myself at least the chance to assent. Why I, who felt so insistently the call of the night outside, and would so much have preferred dreaming in that quiet starlit garden—why I did not rebel against the lighted *salon* and the game

of bridge, I cannot say. Perhaps it was because of my conviction that Monica's relief at my taking her place was deep rooted in some secret and almost uncontrollable aversion she had come to have for that nightly game; though occasionally she offered gallantly to play in my stead. Perhaps it was merely to watch Gregg that I played. I was fascinated by his ease, his luck, for I could not believe that it was all due to pure scientific skill at the game. It seemed rather as if his very passivity, his indifference, worked a charm by which he won. He was never visibly bored nor visibly enthusiastic; yet not once did he evince the least desire to vary the nightly routine.

It seemed strange that a man who had always been free to do as he pleased with every moment of his time should thus enslave himself to monotony. Unless, indeed, there lay underneath that passivity of his an actual passion for cards. Yet he enslaved himself to other monotonies, though he would never have called them that. It was simpler, he said, to decide when you wanted to do a thing, and do it then. Accordingly, he did certain things on certain days. On Mondays and Fridays a carriage, ordered in advance, arrived to take them down to Beaulieu, or

Nice, or sometimes as far as Monte Carlo. He liked going down and browsing in the little antique-shops that are everywhere along the Riviera. And the proprietors of those shops had early discovered that here was a man who knew an antique from a modern, an *objet d'art* from an *objet de marchandise*. Already he had acquired several rare treasures, which I doubt whether I should ever have seen if Monica had not shown them to me. He had put them away out of sight.

"Allan has a genius," she said, "for finding beautiful things."

And so he had. I was with them one day—had gone down in the carriage with them to Nice, where I had some business to transact—and had arranged to meet them afterward at Gregg's favorite shop. As I went in Gregg had just come upon a treasure—a tear-jug of Phenician crystal, shaped like a tiny urn, two inches high. He held it in his hand, and I was struck at once by its exquisite coloring.

The proprietor was speaking, animatedly, in French, and Monica was translating to Gregg.

"He says that tears have colored it. There is the mauve of remorse, the green of envy . . . the faint rose of a lover's farewell."

She was smiling, and her eyes shone with appreciation as she translated.

Gregg heard without comment, his eyes appraising the jug.

"How much does he want for it?" he asked, when she had finished.

He bargained, and bought it, carrying it home, carefully wrapped, to the hotel, where he would have put it away in its box if Monica had not taken it from him and set it up on a shelf, where he seemed perfectly willing to let it remain. But never once afterward did I see him so much as look toward it again.

## CHAPTER XXI

**W**ITHOUT any announcement, Monica had begun to work at her picture again. And every day with a kind of pathetic determination she took up her brushes as if they were weapons by which she sought to conquer some besieging foe. There were days when she seemed to see light, and then for a few moments, for an hour, she touched again her old buoyant mood. But the moments did not last, and she would fall back, silent and dogged, upon that curious grim determination. I could only wish fervently that she would give it up; but something far more important than the completion of any picture lay behind her perseverance.

And little by little it seemed to me that Gregg, always so quietly aloof, had the air of a connoisseur who occupied himself with other pursuits while he waited the fulfilment of a contract. He seemed to expect of her calmly, since no effort of his was involved, to finish the picture she had begun, to create the thing she had dreamed.



She seemed in those days to be the unhappy victim of strangely conflicting emotions, which came and went at another will than her own. It was as if that mysterious undercurrent whose presence I had already sensed swirled ominously upward here and there in its depths and troubled a little the surface of the waters.

There were bits of badinage, like little surface whirlpools catching the sun, which I felt to be thrown out as tests on her part, tests which she could put in no other way, and yet which she found it too much not to put in some way. For instance, when I came into their sitting-room, knocking my three short raps to say it was I, Monica would meet me at the door, brush and palette in hand, her finger upraised, and a gay, yet not at all misleading, twinkle in her eye. "'Shh!'" she would say, with a glance which took in Gregg on his *chaise-longue*, reading his invariable book, and took in at the same time the whole stillness of the room. It was exactly as if she sought by her admonition to reduce to humor something which was fast becoming an enormity. And she seemed to wish to suggest that she had only in the instant of my entrance become conscious of the duration and profundity of the stillness. For it

was more than silence, more than mere quiet. It was something static, an absence of something which should have been present. Yet that something was not speech. It was, as nearly as I may put it into words, the absence of the possibility, the imminence of an interchange, not alone by speech, but by a look even, a gesture, a feeling established between two people by which each may be sure of response, of sympathy, of perhaps even disagreement or argument. And here there was nothing. No atmosphere of sharing with each other the passing fugitive thought.

I found myself wondering if Gregg never, in his reading, interrupted Monica's work to read a sentence, a paragraph, or a phrase aloud; and one day I asked, the context appearing, as contexts had a way those days of appearing, miraculously, to my confusion, as if my thoughts had summoned them, or my suspicions, until I sometimes wondered if those suspicions were not far behind the obvious, if I hadn't really held the kerchief over my eyes long after the knot had been slipped in the back.

I had wished to borrow a book, and had gone in upon the prolonged silence of that room to find Monica working at her easel and Gregg reading on his yellow *chaise-longue*,

and Monica said, in response to my apology for the intrusion, that she was glad of the interruption; she had been working already too long.

"Does Allan never interrupt you?" I asked. "Doesn't he interfere with your work?"

"Allan?" she repeated, a kind of overtone of intensity apparent in her voice. "Allan interrupt!"

She waited a moment, and I had an impression of her trying to let it go at that and being in the end unable, and, convincing me even more, as she turned and moved away from me across the room toward her easel, she said: "*I* couldn't do it! *I couldn't* sit reading as he does for hours, with some one else in the room." Actual passion seemed to enter her voice on the last word—the kind of passion that hurts, that not only now, but through days and days had shaken her to the core.

"Nor could I." I said it because it was true and it was the simplest thing to say.

Gregg had laid down his book, open before him, and had raised his head, with his charming, likable smile, to listen to what we were saying.

"I might interrupt at just the wrong moment," he said. "I think it's only fair that

I keep still when she wants to work; so I read."

He was so reasonable about it, so logical and kind, and suddenly Monica was at his side, her hand caressing his hair.

"He's really the dearest, most considerate husband in the world!" she cried, contrition and love mingling exquisitely in her voice, her gray eyes dark with tenderness.

It was the first of those abrupt and clearly emotional contradictions which came presently to be of almost daily occurrence.

Gregg smiled up at her, and patted her hand, then took up his book again as if the incident were at an end. And it was then, in the way she hesitated an instant before she turned to go back to her painting, that I realized that it was always Monica who, passing his chair, paused to put her arm for a moment about his shoulder, and he, looking up always with his faint, diminishing smile, responded only with the slightest caress of his gentle, delicate hands. Her caresses, the very expression with which she regarded him, were full of warmth, of outgiven love; his were acknowledgments, acceptances, merely, of all that she gave.

This realization came upon me with all the force of an overwhelming, unbelievable

contrast. Yet, when I sought in my memory for the other side of the picture, it was not there; and I saw, against my will, for something in me strove not to see, that in this, as in his outward appearance, his adherence to the gray suit and the vivid tie, Gregg had remained as startlingly unchanged. If he was undemonstrative now, so had he always been. If he failed now to express his love in the hundred small ways a lover may find, I could not remember that he had ever expressed it more. No, it was not he, but our interpretation of him, of his silence and reticence, that was beginning slowly to change.

Monica must in those days have had constantly to bring herself back to her proofs. He had asked her to marry him. He must surely have loved her then. And nothing had happened, no quarrel, no misunderstanding. None, at least, that I knew, and that, I was sure, would have left a more readable mark. Had he not said more than once of late that he was perfectly satisfied; that he would like nothing better than to stay on just as they were in the south of France for the rest of his life? And yet poor Monica's eyes were never quite free of their interrogation, never now quite free from hurt.

In any other case I am sure she would have

had the courage to bring her question out straight. But there was something actually forbidding about a silence like Gregg's. She could only try, in various small feminine ways, to surprise him into some word.

One night Major Brooks asked, apropos of nothing in particular that I recall, how long the Greggs had been married. Monica answered, a little hastily, I thought, and without a glance toward her husband or me:

"Five years."

She had tried to make her voice casual, and she tried to make more casual still the look with which she searched the faces of those two, Major Brooks and his wife, for some trace of surprise. Gregg was looking at her, as if wondering what her object could be, and it seemed incredible that he should fail to see the actual stab of the major's idle reply:

"Five years—about what we thought, eh, Alice?"

They had never so much as suspected that they were bridegroom and bride! Surely, surely that must make him see!

But when the major and Mrs. Brooks had gone, he asked, still with his puzzled air, "Why did you tell them we had been married five years?"

"Just to hear what they would say," she said.

I think he must have caught some warning in her voice, for he hastened to say, "Oh, it's all right, of course, if you don't want them to know."

Several evenings afterward there occurred a defiant little sequel to this. It was while we were playing our rubber of bridge, Mrs. Brooks and the major and Gregg and I, and Monica and Mr. St. John were sitting together on a divan across the *salon* by the door, talking. They had lowered their voices, so as not to disturb us, but their conversation went on animatedly, and they laughed alternately and then together, as if they were tremendously amused by what they were saying. I had been holding the dummy hand, and so had an opportunity to watch them, a little enviously, out of the tail of my eye. The hand played out and the score counted, there ensued that little interim between the shuffling of the cards and the dealing during which, almost as part of the routine, there had always risen a quick interchange of conversation, including Monica and St. John, who often sat reading or talking in undertones while we played. And to-night I had it on the tip of my tongue to call over to them and ask what had amused

them so much, when something in Monica's manner deterred me. She was sitting with her back to us, yet she knew that the bridge hand was played out, and that the interim had arrived when the little conversation was expected to spring up. She knew it by the crisp voice of Mrs. Brooks, cutting suddenly into the stillness of the room, recounting in detail the intricacies of some play she had made; and the major's bantering argumentative replies. But she did not turn. She was pretending not to know. There was an odd air of deliberation in the way she continued to show us only her back, a strange little effect of defiance in the way she kept up the subdued gaiety of their conversation across that narrow interval when they would ordinarily have been talking to us. The deal was finished and we took up our cards, and it was then that Monica sent over her shoulder that quick involuntary glance which gave me the clue to her acting. She was trying to make Gregg jealous! Jealous of St. John!

And watching Gregg, who had sent toward her in that interim the very calmest of husbandly glances, and, seeing her occupied, absorbed in her spirited conversation with St. John, had displayed neither envy nor curiosity, I saw how hopeless an effort it was.



For Gregg rested, or so it seemed to me, not so much in the certainty of Monica's love as in something which had nothing at all to do with her, something within himself. It was as if he rested secure in his own taste—a taste which would never have permitted him to choose a wife whom he could distrust, any more than it would have permitted him to select for his own a spurious object of art.

Monica herself, I believe, had had only faint hope of success. There had been more spirit than verity in her impersonation. She had been *too* intent. And since every one thought St. John pathetic, every one thought her kindness to him was merely evidence of her generosity; though St. John was, they admitted, really amusing to talk to, with those utterly irresponsible ideas of his always cropping out on the most serious subjects. As for St. John himself, he was the last person in the world to suspect that he was being involved in anything more important than a pleasant acquaintance with a very charming young woman.

In that one fleeting, involuntary glance over her shoulder toward Gregg, Monica saw and acknowledged defeat. But she continued, for the sake of her pride, to be absorbed in St. John.

## CHAPTER XXII

IT was Perryman's letter, handed to me as I came in from a walk at noon next day, that brought the thing into some kind of focus for me. Heretofore it had all been ragged ends, pointing nowhere.

Seeing Perryman's handwriting on the envelope surprised me—surprised me disproportionately to its importance. It was like the unexpected entrance into the complications in the second act of the person who had spoken the prologue, and whom we had thought of as engaged solely for that part.

I had heard nothing from Perryman since the letter which crossed the Atlantic with Gregg. The play had progressed far since then.

I sat down in the lobby to read my letter, the first part of which was taken up chiefly with the conditions at home and the expectation of America's entrance into the war. This led him to speak of Gregg.

"Thank God," he wrote, "for fellows like

Gregg. They seem a kind of apology for all this delay—for the rest of us. If there'd been any earthly way to shift my responsibilities, I'd have been there myself long before now."

At the end he said: "Gregg writes that he will go down to the Riviera for a bit of rest when his enlistment expires. I'm afraid he's ill. He must be pretty well used up; but he's so confoundedly modest he'd never say a word. I hear he waived his leave in January. . . . Well, he must have found what he wanted out there with a vengeance! I suppose he'll be in the thick of it now if we come in. Be sure to write me about him if he comes into Paris and you see him before he goes south. I hope the poor devil hasn't taken it too much to heart—overdone the thing and injured his health. . . ."

As I read, I had the curious feeling that Perryman was speaking of some one whom I no longer knew. Certainly not of this Allan Gregg of the last few weeks, who was here, under the same roof with me, at the Grand Hôtel Beau Soleil.

Until that moment I had not seen, as a separate entity, this new Gregg. I had not understood, even, that there was a new Gregg. I had only been perplexed by his

increasingly estranged and unfamiliar personality.

What then, I asked myself, had become of that first Allan Gregg I had known so well, who had been brought so vividly back by those few lines in Perryman's letter; that sensitive, gentle spirit upon whose side I had so immediately felt myself enlisted, to whom my sympathies had been so suddenly drawn?

So gradually, yet so swiftly, had the exchange taken place in my mind, the new image substituted for the old, that not until that moment had I come face to face with the fact that the Allan Gregg I had known in New York, and in Paris, too, had really ceased to exist.

Yet—I had but to read the letter over again to convince myself—he *did* exist for Perryman, still crowned with his halo of glories to come, as completely to-day as ever in the past.

How short a time ago it was that I could have read that letter with no sense whatever of its incongruity, of its being anything more than I myself might have said. But now, as I read, I found myself segregating the things he had said of Gregg into two parts. It was by no conscious or premeditated process of thought that I did this, but involuntarily,

automatically, without any action of will, the thing took place in the most orderly way in my mind.

The first part was made up of facts. The second of interpretations, beliefs.

In the end, two items only comprised the first. Gregg had written that he would go down to the Riviera for a bit of rest when his enlistment expired; and he had waived his January leave. Both matters entirely compatible with the new Gregg.

Into the second went everything else; for everything else had been merely the things Perryman believed of Gregg. Conjectures, interpretations, intuitions of his own concerning him. And not one of these matters—the fear that he was ill, or that he had taken it too much to heart; the belief that he had “found what he wanted out there with a vengeance”—not one of these things accorded with the new Gregg.

It stood out plainly, my deduction, like the third part of a simple syllogism, completing itself, also automatically—presenting its conclusion neatly, concisely, like an adding-machine, ready made, to my mind.

The old Gregg had been made up of our beliefs. The new Gregg of facts.

I saw that the new Gregg was only the old

Gregg with my interpretations, my beliefs, my deductions, my filling in of his silences, left out, discarded.

Could it be—the bizarre simplification suggested itself—that he had always expressed all there was to express?

We had endowed him with a kind of aura, and, like theosophists, had seen in it colors and prophecies. . . .

I looked up. Gregg was coming toward me, down the broad stairs. There was no aura about him now; no, decidedly none. He was simply himself, uncommunicative, calm, and apparently tremendously content.

He crossed the lobby and seated himself, with a nod, in the chair next my own. He waited, as he always did, for some one else to begin the conversation.

"I've just had a letter from Perryman," I said.

He asked, with a fair show of interest, what he had had to say.

"He's worried about you," I said; "he's afraid you're ill."

Gregg looked mystified. "What makes him think that?"

I said I didn't know, unless it was his coming down to the Riviera for a rest. Perryman had read that between the lines.

"But I'd have told him," said Gregg, "if I'd been ill."

I was silent at that, and after a moment he asked if that was all.

Out of some impulse to test its effect, I repeated what Perryman had said about his being "in the thick of it" if we came in.

I thought he was turning over in his mind the possibilities of Perryman's prophecy, for he sat so long before he finally said: "You remember that etching you and Perryman tried to help me find in New York? Did I tell you I found one in Paris? Some Frenchman had done it—the very thing I wanted."

I'm afraid I made no adequate response, but apparently it was sufficient for Gregg, for he dismissed the whole matter presently with the remark, as we rose to go in to luncheon, that he believed he owed Perryman a letter and that he ought really to write.

"Will you write from here?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "Why not?"

"He doesn't know about Monica?"

"No, certainly not. But I don't need to mention *her*."

As he spoke, Monica appeared on the stairs.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**I**N Monica's belief, in Monica's love, the old Gregg still strove valiantly to live. And the tragedy of it was heightened continually by the amazing unawareness of Gregg himself. He had eyes, and saw not, ears, and heard not; and yet one wondered how, lacking both hearing and sight, his heart could have remained unaware.

Serene and undisturbed, he went through the days; and in his negation, his calm, his gentleness, assuming at last the proportions of an inexorable gray ghost, a shade against which she was powerless to contend.

There was something inexorable in the very least of his movements; in his most trivial activity; in the way, for instance, he read the morning paper—deliberately, beginning at the first column and reading it through to the end, every word, every comma and period, before he went on to the next. If Monica, reading, too, commented upon some piece of news, his reply would invariably be, "I



haven't come to that," and Monica's attempted laugh at his little idiosyncrasy would as invariably fail. For I think she was secretly appalled by it—appalled in the way one may be by a trivial physical act which one has come to know as the emanation of a deep, ineradicable quality of spirit.

As he read his paper, so he did everything else. He never idled, never threw himself down full length to luxuriate in idleness. His days were a succession of calm, inexorable employments—one after another, deliberately ordered.

Often I watched him, reading, put down his book, carefully, face down, keeping the place, and take out his pipe, reach for the box on the table where the little patent pipe-cleaners were, open it, take out a cleaner, run it through the pipe and out again, drop the cleaner into the basket at his side, and then, with a deliberate, maddening kind of order, fill the pipe and light it, touching the first glow fastidiously with his slim forefinger. And then I have found myself waiting breathless to see if he would not pause, if only a second, to enjoy it, to taste it, to savor the thing itself. But no; his hand would move toward the book, take it up, and he would have begun again to read at the exact word

where he had left off. Not a human pause; not a moment's divergence from that negative, steady employment.

This same quality was in the way he went in, every night, to his game of bridge. It was in the way, every Monday and Friday, he journeyed down to Monte Carlo or Beaulieu or Nice, for the acquisition, through weeks of bargaining, of those treasures, great or small, which bore increasing witness to the almost equally inexorable perfection of his taste.

His taste, which we had translated into so touching a passion for beauty! . . . And who was I, after all, to say it was not?

Yet, now that I had abandoned translations, and determined to read him, so to speak in his own language, I should add henceforth not a single word. And in this literal reading, many meanings found themselves changed.

His few words we had translated into enthusiasms; his silence into the reticence of great thoughts; his simplest desire into the highest aspiration; his taste into passion for beauty; his fastidiousness into sensitiveness; and his smallest act into a noble deed!

There is a kind of murder in withdrawing one's belief in a fellow-man. Yet one is not

always the murderer. The other may himself have slain our belief.

And in this case, the too plain evidence of Monica's growing unhappiness acquitted me of the crime.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**I**F, during the days that followed, Gregg seemed to grow more than ever like a gray, inarticulate ghost, Monica grew, on the other hand, increasingly alive, increasingly able to suffer hurt. For so strong and enduring a thing was her love that it would not, even to save her pride, be less than love.

Her gray eyes, once so merry and so frank, were veiled now so that the world might not see their constant urgent questioning. She was like one who, having propounded a question, could go no further until she had had her reply.

I have seen women who suffered because of some wound to their love; and women who mourned because their love was dead; but I have seen no woman more truly tragic, because of love, than Monica.

I saw her grateful for his slightest affectionate touch. I saw the whole miserable question fade away under the magic of his sudden boyish smile; and I saw it come back

again and possess her the moment the smile had passed.

There had crept into her attitude toward him a new element, which was akin to the maternal element, emphasized. A tenderness which seemed to wish to shield him against himself, as if she resolved not to believe him responsible for her unhappiness. She would refute her own proof, as a mother might refuse to believe in the faults of a well-loved, wayward child.

And this new attitude alternated with others as new—a kind of false tranquillity, which made her less like Monica than a false exhilaration could ever have done.

I think that during those days there must have been times when she presented to those others—Major and Mrs. Brooks and St. John—the figure of an erratic and temperamental artist. The word “temperamental” slipped out one day when the moment seemed obviously to call for some word. . . . Monica, who had been so equable, so sunny, so to be counted upon!

She was given to sudden turns of mood, turns that seemed merely caprice. Yet I am convinced that, contradictory, paradoxical, and often illogical as she seemed, it was no longer a matter of choice with her. She but

followed the turbulent course of that deep emotional undertow which threatened now and then to draw her completely down.

If her problem had been other than it was—if Gregg had developed into a brute and beaten her, if he had given her reasons for jealousy, or if he had become addicted to drink; or developed violent temper or any tangible cruelty—she could have borne it in silence and dignity. But this—this nothingness, this immateriality, lent itself so easily to doubt. The doubt that she might have imagined it, made it up. And her heart whispering always to her reason that there was no reality in her fear. It was a situation which did not lend itself to the cool dignity of the obviously offended wife.

Never, except upon one occasion, did she come near to touching upon the subject at all, and then I am sure she was brought to it only because of her wish to hear it denied. And, too, I think she feared, whenever we were alone, that I might, out of some notion of duty or responsibility, take it into my head to speak. And perhaps it was to forestall mine that she made her own sudden attack.

At any rate, there had been nothing to lead up to it when it came:

"Tell me, Gilbert—would you say marriage had changed me much?"

There was surely her old frankness in this attack. Yet, just what she was taking for granted I was at a loss to know. But there was something so brave, so gallant, about her bearing her standard thus unprotected into the open that I wished only to say what she most wanted to hear.

"Changed?" I said. "How?"

"Why, I'm getting *queer*!"

I resisted the impulse to say that she wasn't half so queer as the marriage itself; that it was enough to make any one queer—that it was almost, in fact, making *me* queer.

Instead, I only laughed, and I actually believe that, so doubtful was she of any ground, and so much did her wish forerun the thought, that she was for the moment at least, satisfied that I had not been aware of anything wrong.

For she laughed, too, as if tremendously relieved, and she said, in her old playful tone, "It's nice of you not to see it, of course, but I *am*, just the same!"

## CHAPTER XXV

**M**ORE than once I was on the verge of speaking to Gregg. But, face to face with his imperturbability, I could find no way to begin.

For what, I continually asked myself, *could* I say, short of the whole miserable explanation; and that would have involved statements concerning him which I was neither prepared nor privileged to make. And if I had made them, disregarding privileges and preparation — putting, as clearly as it was possible for me to put it, my own feeling of responsibility—would he have seen? Was it not just that inability of his to see, of which I must chiefly have had to complain?

Hints and subtleties were of no use. There had been enough, Heaven knows, of them to tell him more than I could ever have told. No; if he had not been able to read so plain a text as had been constantly before his eyes, there was little hope of his reading anything between the lines.



Monica, too, deterred me. She seemed, by something in her manner, to be relying upon me not to speak. It was as if she begged me to go on, for her sake, believing in Gregg. And that, for her sake, I tried most earnestly to do. But such things are not within the power of a man to control. I could only keep, as best I might, the visible evidence of our friendship unchanged.

A restraint was growing up between us—a restraint that made itself felt whenever we three found ourselves alone. Gregg was no more silent than he had always been; but one might have said that Monica and I had both been stricken with Gregg's own reticence. Since we had left off those conversations in which we hastened to fill in his silences, we could no longer fill in our own.

And when Monica and I were by any chance for a few moments alone, the restraint amounted to a kind of embarrassment, which Monica covered with the most heroic nonsense.

She was, it seemed to me, in just the situation which might have been—what shall I say?—softened, ameliorated, sweetened, by the presence of some woman friend. Mrs. Brooks, somehow, had not qualified for the

part; her rôles were too well established—and in them she was, I must say, both brilliant and adequate—to admit of her taking on anything new.

But I thought of Alice Germaine, of Mary Lynch, of a half-dozen women of Monica's acquaintance. Any one of them would have served, and, it seemed to me more and more, would have served beautifully, in some capacity no man could possibly enter; but a capacity I could hardly define, because, I suppose, I had not yet been able to define the need to be filled.

At any rate, it led me one day to suggest that it would be pleasant for her if Alice or Mary were here.

She stopped short what she was doing, as if struck by something in that possibility which had never occurred to her before. And then, turning her back as she was getting to do more and more now when she spoke, "You forget, Gilbert, that this is my honeymoon," she said.

I knew then that the presence of a woman friend would have terribly complicated something in the situation for Monica, though I didn't exactly see how. Why was it that now, of all times, Monica could feel herself more comfortable in the society of men?

Was it, in her situation, the charity or the stupidity of men she relied upon, or found more easily bearable?

One thing I had seen—not only in Monica, but in other women as well—finely tuned women, of that sort, I mean. And it is that they shun other women—and particularly their friends who know them best—when they are passing through trial—trial, that is, in which there may be a certain element I hesitate to name in connection with Monica—yet which, Heaven help her, I knew she was conscious of—a trial somehow a little tinged with shame.

That I must say and leave. To modify it, or attempt to soften or explain, would be to make it worse. And it is too bad as it is.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE record of all that time I shall not attempt to set down. The details were too trivial, too unattached, and, taken by themselves, often too absurd; yet seeming, even then, like so many little straws blown strangely in one direction.

There were days when Monica, who had been so active all her life, rebelled openly against her idleness. It was the only thing against which she *could* openly rebel.

She rebelled at the softness of the life, and the complaisant beauty of the hills. She grew, I think, to almost hate the cloudless blue of the sky, the flaunting colors, and what she spoke of one day as the "*laissez-faire* of the flowers."

"I sometimes think," she said, "that I never was meant for beautiful places like this. I long for harsh landscape, for arid places, rugged and hard and bleak!"

It was the rebellion of her stalwart, courageous soul against the softness, the cruel,

selfish persistence of all that harmony and ease, while the world rocked with passion beyond those indifferent hills.

"Allan!" she confronted him suddenly one day, "isn't there something we can *do*?"

"Do?" he repeated. "I thought we came here for a rest."

And she could hardly, after what he had done, deny his right to rest. Yet he made no reference to it himself. He had, save the mark, too much good taste for that!

Monica wrote then to "*Mademoiselle*" at the *pension*, asking for the names of some of her *poilus* who needed things, and offering her help with the letters, too. In a few days came a reply, in "*Mademoiselle's*" fine pointed French, in which she thanked her beautifully, attached a modest list of names, with the small comforts needed by each, and ended with bits of news of the *pension*. These Monica read aloud for my benefit, since they were all in a measure old friends. The Countess Rivat had been ill with an influenza, she had begged "*Mademoiselle*" to extend her most earnest felicitations to *Mademoiselle West*. *Madame Gironde* was, as usual, very much occupied. She wished also to be remembered. Then, "You remember, of course, *Madame Latour*. *Monsieur*, her

husband, was killed in battle on the eighteenth. . . .”

Monica stopped, raised her head as if she were going to speak, and then her eyes were suddenly flooded with tears.

“Madame Latour,” she said—“little Madame Latour. . . .” And then, before the unsteadiness conquered her lips, rose abruptly, handed her letter, open, to me, and went from the room, hastening just as she passed through the door, as if ashamed and unnaturally alarmed by those sudden uncontrollable tears. I heard her stumble a little, blindly, against the stairs.

But I found myself thanking Heaven suddenly that the poor child *could* cry for another woman’s grief.

When she was gone I sat there repeating, as she had done, the name of Madame Latour. She who had been transfigured by the mere sight of a letter from the hand of him who now lay dead. *Mort pour la patrie! Mort pour la patrie!* Like a refrain it ran in my head. A refrain that was like to find its way into every heart in France!

I took up the letter Monica had handed to me when she left the room, and my eyes fell on the very paragraph at which she had stopped. I read it again. “Monsieur, her

husband, was killed in battle on the eighteenth. *Pauvre madame!*" continued "Mademoiselle." "It is as if she herself had received the mortal wound."

The letter ended with "Mademoiselle's" felicitations, and "it gives me pleasure to hear that you are enjoying so pleasant a holiday and that you have found the Riviera so beautiful."

So she had told her that! I could imagine her writing it out of some vague hope that to see it put down in words might somehow bring it true.

After that, Monica went oftener down to Nice than their bi-weekly trip, to shop and send off small parcels to the front — and letters.

And she gave up her picture altogether. I think even Gregg was glad of that.

## CHAPTER XXVII

I LOOK back now upon days when the whole affair of Monica and Gregg dropped for me to the level of the tritest case of disillusionment. A woman blinded in the old way, idealizing the man with whom she has fallen in love, cheating herself with hero worship and sentiment. A commonplace man, who has never been more or less than that—a little bewildered now by her vagaries, but, on the whole, taking them as those things which no man hopes to understand in his wife, and willing generously to overlook them for the sake of peace.

But, how to account for the rest of us. For we, no less than Monica, had idealized Gregg. How account for Major Brooks, who believed in him more every day?

And how, more than anything else, account for the things Gregg had done? The experiences he had himself sought. Surely his tastes were far from commonplace, and his life far from a commonplace life.



Yet, he was like an actor who had learned all his lines, but none of the little bits of action which bring the whole drama to life. It was horribly like that, and as dreadful, as little like life, to watch. Only, of course, that it *was* life, and a little more dreadful because of that.

He had had all the experiences of other men—had them; and that was all. Had he only acquired them, then? Was the mere acquisition the end of his desire?

I remembered abruptly a thing Perryman had said long ago of Gregg. "Extraordinary," he said, "a man with such feeling for beautiful things and unable to give it any expression whatever—except buying them."

It became, this idea of his acquisitiveness, once discerned, once brought to the light, like a problem in mathematics which only proved itself anew by whatever system I sought to resolve it.

All his life he had acquired, acquired—treasures, experience, knowledge. He had paid little when it was possible to buy for little, driving a thrifty bargain. But no price, once decided upon, was too high for the acquisition of a coveted thing if it could not be had for less. He had desired the experience of war, and he had paid the price of his

own discomfort and danger for months. He had closed the bargain, fairly, one must admit that. He had brought out of it no vital gift, as he had given none. It had not entered into his soul, had not enriched him—it had given him no deeper root in the soil of life. Yet he valued it, counted it among his possessions, one could see that.

There were all the small tangible treasures—the pictures, the objects of art. The room in Duluth which Perryman had described to me, with its Damascene and its water-colors put away, and the etchings. Here, in their sitting-room at the Beau Soleil, the things Monica had showed me; and in the corner on the high shelf was still standing the exquisite little tear-jug for which I had seen Gregg bargain and pay a stiff price, and which he never took down nor touched.

Imperturbable, in his yellow *chaise-longue*, he passed hours every day, held—I was about to say enthralled—by his slow, unending succession of books. He was never enthralled by any book; but he gave them his undivided attention, one as much as another, never shirking a word. It was not even, one felt, so living a thing as interest—certainly never thrall. He would say, if you asked him, that he did or did not care for a

book, yet I have never known him to abandon one before he had read it through. It would seem that here his taste was less discriminating, and I thought of this decline with relief. At last I should see that leaven of imperfection that would bring his taste to life. But I perceived that here also he went toward an end. It was part of the hardship he suffered for the attainment of being well read.

History, politics, literature—what a store of knowledge he must have acquired! Yet he had not transmuted it, as another man would have done, into certainties of his own. His knowledge, too, had remained a possession, an acquisition, outside himself.

And now—the great treasure of Monica's love—oh, his taste was impeccable! He valued her; knew her worth; and—the hateful analogy grew—he was as aloof from her as from the rest; he no more thought of a passing caressing touch than if she had been inanimate; a pearl of price, bargained for, acquired, and the transaction closed.

Yet, surely he must know that the rarest pearl must be worn or it dies.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**P**ERHAPS it is true of the artist's mind, accustomed to translating the world into a medium of its own, that it sees no abstraction clearly until the clarifying symbol is found. I am sure, at any rate, that it was so for Monica, and that she had been no more able than I to translate the mystery of Gregg until that day when, in the dim far corner of an old curiosity-shop, Gregg himself unearthed and brought to light the symbol of his strange abstraction.

I had gone down with them to Nice, and, lured by some rather fine things in a window, we had entered the shop; and the proprietor had let us wander about by ourselves, each of us following separate quests of our own.

And presently I heard Gregg, who had penetrated unerringly to the shadowy heart of the place, telling Monica to see what he had found. And then he called to me.

When I made my way across to them, he

had taken down from its shelf a carved alabaster box, slightly oblong, beautifully proportioned, and covered lightly with dust.

He laid it down on the table before him, and, bending, blew away the layer of dust, so that the alabaster shone whitely in the dim light.

He lifted the lid with his gentle, slender hand, then closed it down again.

"I'd like to have that box," he said.

"For what?" asked Monica, his voice having implied some purpose he had in mind.

His fingers still lingered on the carved lid of the box.

"To keep something in—that I liked," he said.

Monica stood without moving, as one transfixed by some sudden and terrifying vision passing before her eyes.

There was an instant in which I struggled against the significance of that vision reaching my brain. But I could not keep it out. It was there present, before us, seeming to occupy actual space—the space between us and Gregg.

The alabaster glowed under the gentle touch of his hand. It was like a light shed backward, touching all the secret acts of his life.

And one saw that every fine thing, every treasure, every experience, the knowledge of other men's thoughts, he had closed away each in its box of alabaster, through which they glowed softly, according to their color and their intensity.

That was what he had done with the tragedy of his early marriage—that and its bitterness he had closed away in an alabaster box—and now and then when men talked of such things he would reach out with his gentle hand and draw the box toward him across the table and into the range of the others, and they, seeing the tragedy glow dimly within, were filled with the impression of bitterness suppressed, of wrongs borne, of unfathomed depths of reserve.

And his fatherhood, he had put that away, too, in a box of its own. It explained at last his attitude toward the child he had so lightly relinquished to an unworthy mother.

He had put the stupendous, the indelibly colored experience of the war away in an alabaster box, and now he was content, having it there, never to open it again, but to watch it glowing somberly through.

And last, the rarest, most delicate treasure of them all, Monica's love. Had he taken that, like everything else, and, once sure of

its possession, laid it aside out of reach in an alabaster box?

Gregg's hand still lingered on the beautifully carved lid.

"You don't like it?" he said.

Monica answered, her voice sounding strange: "Like it? Why, yes."

But Gregg, from what impulse I do not know, took up the box and put it back on its shelf.

He did not even ask its price.

## CHAPTER XXIX

**I**T may have been that in the hour of defeat Monica summoned again all the strength of her love to regain her lost paradise. I do not pretend to say. But that night her old tenderness seemed suddenly to have revived. And she seemed, in some curious way, to be trying to convince me of something, too, trying to turn my mind away from something she had allowed to go too long.

Major Brooks had been too ill to come down to dinner that night, so there was no bridge, and Monica and Gregg and I passed the evening together in their sitting-room.

And I saw Monica, recognizing her moment, rally all the forces at her command, and bear her colors out into the open again.

She sought out reasons for praising Gregg, as if she paid now a debt long deferred. She spoke of his service at the front, of his endurance, his heroism. "And because *he* never speaks of it, no one else ever does! No one has given him credit!"



It was a strange night, in which I added my delayed praise to hers, because it was doing her, I could see, some deep, inestimable good. And because he *had* done all the things she said, and we *hadn't* given him credit.

Life has a way now and then of seeking to disprove what she has just been at particular pains to prove, as if overcome with remorse at having admitted so much truth. And that night Gregg talked more freely than I had ever known him to do; not expansively—he could never do that—but easily, drawn on by Monica's questions and her unceasing tact; so that I began to wonder in spite of myself how much of his silence had been due to us.

She led him from reminiscence to reminiscence, and there began to come back the old sense of his charm and of the things he left unsaid.

He was relating presently an incident in which a certain "sanctimonious divinity student from Boston" played a minor part. He always, Gregg said, spoke of the wounded *poilus* he carried in his ambulance as "my poor *blessés*;" apparently he couldn't say just "*blessés*" alone.

"But mayn't he have felt that way about them?" suggested Monica, interrupting now for the first time.

"Oh, I suppose it's *possible*," said Gregg, "but I don't believe it myself."

"But," said Monica, "for instance, the man you spoke of a little while ago, the one you called the bad head case" (he had told quite incidentally of his ambulance breaking down one night while he was carrying a *poilu* who was frightfully wounded in the head) — "didn't you feel that about *him*? Wouldn't you have spoken of him as your 'poor *blessé*'?"

"Certainly not! Why should I? I didn't know him," said Gregg.

I can feel yet the almost sickening blow of that reply.

Incredible it was, like the grotesque and horrible climax of a dream.

And after a long moment, Monica actually passed her hand across her eyes, as if she wakened herself from sleep.

And presently, I do not know how, we were speaking quite casually of commonplace things and we continued to speak of them until, some ten minutes later, I said good night.

I did not go to my room, but down through the sleeping hotel, and out into the quiet night. I wanted to be by myself, and think.

I had gone out through the door that led to the level park, choosing that side because people seldom walked there, preferring the gardens, and, if by chance any late loiterers should be about, I should not be disturbed.

I followed the path that curved along the drive, until I came to a little rustic seat, secluded under the trees, and there I sat down to think. The brooding starlight lay over the world, and a single giant mimosa, luminous with yellow bloom, filled the night with fragrance.

So much peace and beauty in the world!  
So much strife and ugliness in human hearts! . . .

I had been sitting there fifteen minutes, perhaps more, lost deep in my own thoughts, when I heard some one approaching from the direction of the hotel. And suddenly a woman came into sight, not in the path, but in the very middle of the drive. Not until she was almost even with me did I recognize the embroidered Indian scarf which Monica had worn that night. She strode, rather than walked, head up, every line of her young figure strained taut, body and mind and soul leagued together in some violent rebellion.

I watched her go by, swiftly, fiercely, straight ahead, as if by sheer physical energy

she sought to subdue the storm that raged within.

For an instant I was afraid, so that I got up and stepped to the edge of the path. I saw her go down the long avenue to the end; saw her stand immobile a moment, then turn and pass quickly out of sight.

I knew by what path she had gone, and that it led to the white-walled road that ran back into the country beyond. So, fearing a little still, I followed along the path to the turn of the road, down which I saw her clearly, the one living thing between those straight white walls.

Unconscious of the night, unconscious of distance, unconscious of effort or weariness, she went, as if she could go on forever, on to the end of the world.

The road led straight for a mile, where it was cut across by the broad band of the old highway. Standing still in the shelter of the trees, I watched her on to the very end, and there, stopping abruptly, she wheeled and began to come back.

Not wishing to be discovered, I waited only until she had come half way, and then, knowing there was no road by which she might turn off, I began slowly to walk back toward the hotel.

I had come within sight of the entrance, and, not wanting to go in, I stepped back a little into the shelter of the tree-bordered path where I should not be seen.

Almost in that instant Gregg appeared in the door, silhouetted sharply against the light.

I saw him step out, look slowly up and down, with a kind of wondering, puzzled air, and then walk across the drive and stand beside the giant mimosa whose perfume filled the night.

He seemed to be waiting, quite calmly and certainly; and standing there, slight and a little dim in his gray suit, under that yellow-blossoming tree, he took on more than ever for me the illusion of some gray, immaterial ghost.

And presently I heard her coming, walking swiftly, fiercely, as before, down the middle of the drive. Then she came into sight, some passionate, desperate purpose seeming to drive her on to her goal. She passed where I stood close enough almost for me to reach out and touch.

Gregg saw her, I think, before she had seen him; for he moved a step outward, still under that luminous tree.

I saw her pause, startled; stand perfectly still. And then I saw her suddenly spent,

the storm drained suddenly out; and, as if utterly tired, I saw her move across the space that separated them.

"Where have you been, dear?" I heard his quiet voice, and saw him draw her into the curve of his arm. And I heard her little broken cry, "Oh Allan! Allan!" as she surrendered herself to his gentle embrace.

I watched them go in, then, through the lighted door, still with his arm laid lightly about her waist.

And it was only then that I began to know what it had meant to her to give him her love, and that this was neither the first time nor the last that she had sought to take it back, and failed.

## CHAPTER XXX

FOR hours that night I lay awake, wondering how it would end, and going over and over in my mind the possibilities, which turned with almost automatic regularity into impossibilities. I had a harassing sense of having been called upon to act and having failed. Yet there was nothing, absolutely nothing, that I *could* do but wait. And that, after the appalling light Gregg, in four words, had flashed upon the desert of his soul, was the most difficult task I could have been set. If we had been able to ignore what he said at the time, and to go on talking of other things, it was because there are things against which we will accuse our own ears of falsification, our own eyes of perjury, rather than admit we have heard. It is the self-defense, the will to live, of the soul.

How, I asked myself, should I meet Monica the next day, with that unlaid memory haunting us?

When the next day came I said to myself

that I wanted to give them time—time for what I didn't attempt to explain. I made an excuse of a sketching trip, and went out early, before there was a possibility of their coming down. And I left word at the desk where I had gone — a thing I shouldn't ordinarily have felt called upon to do. I was perfectly free to go where I chose.

It was conscience, you see. I couldn't have been altogether sure that I wasn't just running away. For, whatever was going to happen, I knew that now more than ever it was for me to stand by. Though I should have liked to run away permanently, never to have gone back. I couldn't bear the thought of facing Gregg again, or, rather, I think, I couldn't bear the thought of his facing me.

It was half past four when I returned to the hotel, coming up through the terraced garden from the entrance gate at the foot of the hill. As I mounted the three steps of the last terrace Gregg and Monica came out the door.

Monica was wearing a soft white gown, with no touch of color anywhere.

They stood waiting for me to come up.

I had expected a calm after the storm, but I had hardly expected calm like this. You would have said that those two had



never known an emotion stronger than contentment in all their lives.

Gregg and I lifted our hats, in the manner of friends too familiar, and too languid in the afternoon heat, to have need of words.

"Sketching?" asked Monica, not even avoiding my eyes.

"Since morning," I said.

"A good day for sketching," said Gregg.

"Yes."

We stood there, seeming, all three of us, at the most perfect and idle ease.

A waiter came out, bearing a tray; and we stood aside to let him pass.

"Tea, Gilbert?" said Monica. "We've ordered it here in the garden."

I said it was just what I wanted, and, when I had put my box inside, we followed the waiter across to the table where he had put down his tray.

Monica poured our tea, and I remember that she asked the waiter for more brioche and another allowance of sugar for me. And we must have said other things. Some conversation, desultory and unimportant, to be sure, but conversation, nevertheless, must have passed between us. But I remember none of it now. I remember only the unnatural tranquillity of Monica's face.

It may have been the unrelieved white of her gown that made her seem pale. Even the little rosy triangle of sunburn at her throat seemed to have faded out. And she could look me levelly in the eyes, as if she had no longer any fear of what I might read.

I had even no longer the sense of that undercurrent which had never been absent before. I had, instead, the uncanny feeling that the waters had closed over her—that she had allowed herself to go down. Her spirit was so still, so motionless. . .

And I had an utterly insane impulse at times to rush in and rescue her body at least.

She was so kind to Gregg. Not generously kind, but naturally, simply so, as if there had never been a flaw in their relationship. Perhaps she had been able to forget altogether the evidence of the night before. They say that when we are dead we remember only the good in those we have left behind. Perhaps it was that, with her. It was enough like it, God knows!

And when, the next day and the next, she continued exactly the same, I began to be alarmed. Would she never come back to herself? Had something within her really died? I watched her as she went about in

that strange, counterfeit calm, neither avoiding people nor seeking them out, doing all the things she was expected to do, saying all the things she was expected to say. But her voice had never a trace of the old vibrant tone which had been its charm; her hands, those eager, eloquent hands, were quiet now, and gentler than Gregg's own. And all her old swiftness was gone; she moved unhurried now, as if there were no longer anything to be gained or lost. And she was never away from Gregg's side.

Of the two during that time, Gregg was by far the most alive. For a ghost, such as Gregg had come to seem, still has some kind of life; but she was like a body from which the living spirit had fled. I even caught myself wondering, fantastically, if she mightn't appear to me—her spirit, I mean—with some message, some sign to say that she lived.

And Gregg, I verily believe, missed nothing from their companionship. He thought her, I have not the least doubt, more normal than usual.

## CHAPTER XXXI

ON the fourth day I stayed in my room until noon, pretending to be at work. In reality I was still avoiding *them*. I couldn't bear seeing Monica; and I could less bear seeing Gregg. For one thing only I found myself thanking fate, and that was that I was there, at hand, if anything should happen, but the possibilities of anything happening seemed to recede with every hour. How could anything happen with those two like that? Unless something, something outside, came in and intervened.

And it was something outside which did intervene.

I went down a little early for luncheon, in time to catch the noon post, and in the lobby I found Major Brooks and Gregg and St. John, all holding newspapers open in their hands.

They turned as I appeared on the stairs, and the major started toward me excitedly.

"Have you seen it?" he called, holding his

paper up. And St. John held up *his* paper, with the black head-lines across the top, and called out, "Congratulations!"

I knew what it was. It could be but one thing. America's declaration of war had come at last!

A thrill—a new and different kind of thrill—went suddenly straight to my heart . . . America . . . America . . . !

The old major was shaking hands so enthusiastically, so officially, that I had, when I woke up to it, the ridiculous feeling of his having mistaken me for the commander of the advancing American army. Then St. John shook hands excitedly, too.

"Great news, this morning, great news!" he said, and gave me his paper to read.

It was to be supposed that they had, so to speak, already welcomed Gregg, and it was natural for them to have expected something between us two.

Gregg was standing a little aside, with the beginning of his slow smile in his eyes, which made him look well pleased with the world, and particularly with to-day's news.

"Well, Gregg," I said, "so we're in!"

"We're in," he repeated, and, as if he had been waiting the end of these amenities, sat down in the nearest chair and began to read

the text of the newspaper despatch, word for word, from the head-line down.

"A great day for the Allies," said the major.

"And a greater day for America," said I.

It was then that I saw Monica coming toward us down the stairs. She saw at once that something was up, and her glance went from face to face inquiringly. But she had seen the head-lines before any of us spoke, and the news had brought her suddenly alive. The unexpected thrill had reached her heart. The color was in her face, and the swiftness in her feet as she ran down the last of the steps and across to us.

"War?" she cried. "America? We're in?"

The major, St. John, and I all answered at once, and she hesitated with a little excited laugh between the papers we held out to her, and her eyes took in with swift inclusive glances all the salient points of the tremendous news.

Gregg had risen at the first sound of her voice, and stood now holding his paper so as to keep his place. Oh, he was politeness itself. Monica seemed not to know he was there.

"Think," she was saying, "how it must be at home to-day!"

I was already thinking of that.

"I suppose," said Major Brooks, "you'll all be scattering now."

"I will be, for one," I said.

"How about you?" asked the major, turning to Gregg.

And then Monica remembered. She looked at Gregg with a kind of fear, as if she had been brought back too abruptly to her own small realities. Then she waited, almost breathless, for what he was going to say.

"I don't know," said he, the quietness of his voice a rebuke to all our excitement. There's no use getting excited and rushing off until there's something to do. I'll stay on here for a while until I decide."

I could not deny that, compared to the precipitation of my answer, with no plan behind it at all, his was by far the more reasonable. And yet his very reasonableness made up my mind for me. To hear him say it convinced one that to stay on anywhere until one could *decide* would be intolerable. I would do something at once; go somewhere; offer myself in some capacity.

When, during luncheon, I looked over at the Greggs facing each other across their small table, I saw that Monica's color had

gone; she had succumbed again to her strange passivity.

But those few moments when she *had* come back had put to rout my greatest anxiety, for they were proof to me that her spirit awaited only some sufficiently imperative call to return and claim its own. Perhaps it but rested against that time.

It was that consciousness, I think, which made it possible for me to leave them there alone. For that was what, in the end, I did.

In two days I had finished up my work with a rush, and engaged my place in the Paris train.

I said my good-bys all together—Monica saw to that. To the major, who said he might see me in Paris before long, and to Mrs. Brooks and St. John and Monica and Gregg and the proprietor of the hotel—all standing in the doorway as I drove away.

It was just as well, I suppose; though I should have gone better satisfied for one word from Monica, one real word from the real Monica. But to have sought it myself would have been, as she was then, of no earthly use. So I could only do as I did. I left them there to time and to the certain courage of Monica's renascent will.



## CHAPTER XXXII

**I**N Paris a cable awaited me—the result of those letters I had written months before to Washington, and that cable, by a sheer stroke of luck, put me to work at once. I was to get together an exhibit of French war posters to send to America, which involved negotiations that might have been tedious had the task not been ready made to my hand. That, of course, was why they gave it to me.

Those were stirring days in Paris for Americans, the few who were there before our soldiers came. It was cold and uncomfortable enough so far as the weather was concerned, but we had a warmth at our hearts that we had not felt before.

I heard casually—twice, I think—during that month from Gregg and Monica—a little short note from each, the kind of note that speaks of everything except that which is nearest the heart.

There were times during those weeks when, thinking of Allan Gregg, he seemed a monstrous destructive force, laying that terrible

negation of his like a blight upon life. And there were times when he seemed less than commonplace, hardly a person at all, not worthy of so much thought; and that he had been the recipient of a love so great as Monica's seemed only a tragic waste. He seemed to swing in my mind from the first extreme to the last, and never did he tarry for an instant in any merely human medium of normality.

But duties crowded every hour of the day and gave me little time to think of those two I had left at the Grand Hôtel Beau Soleil.

When, the last of the month, we had the news that conscription had passed both Houses at home, I began, as every one did, after the first gasp of surprise, to cast about among my acquaintances for those whom it might touch. It made me feel suddenly very old. What youngsters they were, what children, those lads I could think of within the age! For the first time I realized that it was in truth "the flower of the nation" that we proposed to offer up. Yes, my thirty-six years seemed suddenly very old.

It was not until late that night that I thought of Allan Gregg. It gave me a kind of shock, for it brought so much in its train.

He was only thirty—I remembered having

heard him say. Yes, I was sure of it now. I recalled the very time and place.

So he would have to go, whether he wished it or not. I wondered whether he *would* wish it or not. He had chosen it once, of his own accord; he might even be glad to go back again. For the first time I realized how little I really knew of Allan Gregg. Upon one point only did all my conjectures agree. I could imagine him doing nothing he did not want to do. How, in case he *didn't* want to go, and he was under the age, he was to manage it, I hadn't an idea. Only, I had a kind of unswervable faith in Gregg's power to pursue, inexorably, his own course. That much prophecy I allowed myself to make.

Coming home at mid-afternoon on the first Monday in May, I found old Thérèse descending the stairs.

"*Mademoiselle est en haut,*" she said, nodding over her shoulder, and stopping to let me pass.

"Mademoiselle?" I asked. "Mademoiselle who?"

"Mademoiselle West," said Thérèse.

It came over me at once that they were on their way home; that Gregg had made up his mind.

That was why, I suppose, when I opened the studio door, I was so surprised to see Monica there alone. She was sitting across in the window-seat, looking out, and tapping, a little impatiently, with her finger-tips on the sill; she turned quickly when she heard me come in.

She was amused, I think, at the expression of my face, for she sat there smiling, waiting for me to speak.

"Monica!" I said. "Well, Monica!"

"Yes, Monica," she said, and got up with her hand outstretched.

We shook hands, and I said it was a happy surprise; and then I think I actually looked round the room—"Where is Allan?" I asked.

"Allan didn't come, Gilbert," she said.

It was to the suddenness of her implication that I could not adjust myself. I had, you see, expected something else. I had been thinking of Gregg, of what he would be likely to do; I had looked forward a little to some action from him. And for an instant I couldn't understand that it had come from Monica.

If I had not known it in the first glance, I should have known now, as she spoke, how fully her spirit had returned to its command. The old frankness was in her eyes; the old

overtones, a little intensified, perhaps, were in her voice; she could even be sorry for me in my momentary bewilderment, for she said, as if to help me out, "I didn't mean to surprise you this way, but I hadn't time to write."

And then I found my speech, and scolded her for thinking she must apologize. And that put us upon our old-time footing at once.

She had, of course, come prepared to tell me, or she would never have come at all. I didn't want to subject her to questions, or even to statements, for matter of that; but I knew it would make it easier for her to tell, if I asked.

So I said, skipping all that tacitly went between, "Tell me, Monica, what is Allan going to do?"

"I left him buying a villa," she said. Her answer was so conclusive and so immediate that it gave me a kind of shock. Had I made a mistake? Hadn't she meant to imply, then, what I had thought? Could it be possible that she had come up to Paris on some such domestic mission as the buying of furnishings?

I suppose I must have repeated blankly, "Villa . . .?"

"He says it's the time to buy, since so

many families have lost everything in the war; they'll be forced to sell at a sacrifice."

She said it and left it. Her briefness and her silence seemed to say that she knew I should understand. There was no mistaking her now. She had given me simply the fact, as if anything less than the fact would be less than the truth—and it was the truth she had determined to convey.

"It's turned out badly, hasn't it, child?" I said.

"I'm afraid it has," she said, smiling her little rueful smile.

"But the draft, what about that? I've been thinking he'd have to go."

She said *that* was complicated, the most complicated part of it all.

I said I didn't see how it could be, and she said, oh yes, it could, if it simplified it for him.

"But he is," I said, "within the age?"

"Oh yes, just within it."

"Well, then . . .?"

"There's a chance, if they put it off long enough, that he won't be. But he isn't counting on that. He has it all perfectly planned."

It seemed that he had made no attempt to conceal his wish not to go. He had even

taken for granted that she had understood it all along. He had explained to her, quite simply then, that there would very likely be no arrangement made to draft men living abroad. The number of men, he said, would never be worth the machinery involved. So there was no reason why, since there were surely great bargains to be had, they shouldn't look about for a suitable villa, and settle down peaceably for the duration of the war! He couldn't think, he said, of a more beautiful spot, or one where he would rather be! And he had begun looking at once — had made even a tentative offer, very low, for a charming little place, with a garden he specially liked, overlooking the sea. He could easily make his father see that it was an investment too good to miss. Prices would go up again immediately after the war.

Of course he hadn't rested upon that as a certainty. He was far too sensible for that; it was only a conjecture, at most. But a reasonable conjecture, he felt. Yet he had faced the other contingency. In case there *should* be a rule covering men abroad, he would go home at once and volunteer. He had influence enough to place him in whatever service he chose; there would be plenty of fairly pleasant berths that some one would

have to fill. It wouldn't be so bad, if it came to it; but of course he preferred staying where he was.

I could hear him telling her that, in his even, reasonable voice, and I could feel what she must have felt as she heard the plan unfold.

"Oh, it was all aboveboard," she said, "irreproachably legal and—and frank! I suppose I should have been thankful that he could tell me exactly the truth. There are men who haven't the courage, who'll go, hating it, afraid to say what they feel—"

She broke off, for her meaning was turning itself about. She had meant to give him credit, and she was somehow making it worse.

"Oh, I won't pretend any longer!" she cried, interrupting me in my very first word. "I'd rather he had lied! That he'd claimed he was over the age, or that he had run away! There'd have been something *human* in that!" She stopped short again, and then, having said already more than she wished to say, she rested her case. "That's why, Gilbert, I've come away."

"You don't need to explain," I said.

"I knew I shouldn't," she said. Yet I heard, it seemed, a faint note of relief in her



voice. I suppose she hadn't, poor child, really been sure of anything but herself.

We had been standing, and now I drew up a chair for her and made her sit down, and then I asked her what she proposed to do. I knew she had made some plan.

She answered, "I'm going home."

"Home?"

"Yes, by the very first steamer that sails."

When I think of the generosity and the gratitude of her first, "You're responsible for it, Gilbert," on that autumn morning when we had seen Gregg off to the front, and now her equally generous refutation of it, when I tried to express to her how responsible I did feel for it all, I know more than ever that hers are the qualities which endure.

She had said she was grateful then, and now she said it again, though all the facts had changed. Grateful to me "for understanding," she said. I said that the time for me to understand had been last autumn; that I ought, if I had wanted it to do any good, to have understood then. And she answered, determined to shift none of the blame, "So ought I." Then she added, as if she would still be fair to us both, "But we thought we *did*, you see."

And then, after a silence when her thoughts seemed to go very deep, she roused herself to say, "Do you know, I've the strangest feeling that Allan—the old Allan, I mean, that we knew—was killed out there at the front—that it wasn't our Allan who came back at all."

And that, more than anything else she could ever have said, proved the endurance and the grace of her generosity.

We sat there talking until the light began to change in the studio; and many of the things that had seemed to need words found themselves, now that the need for silence was gone, already understood. The tension between us was lifted, and we seemed to travel back over all those weeks that had gone, to the place where our friendship had been before. Trivialities took their old place in our talk; small things were no longer a disguise for great.

Yet it was not of the situation between Monica and Gregg that we talked; of that we had both thought too much of late. It was of everything and of nothing, as it had used to be, coming back now and then to touch upon some happening at the Beau Soleil, for we were in no way trying to ignore it. It was like a subject of which we had

been wearied, from which we were glad to escape.

I asked about the major and Mrs. Brooks, and St. John—whether they knew about her coming away. The Brookses, she said, had gone, two weeks or more before. St. John was still there. She had said good-by to him, and told him she had been called up to Paris suddenly; and she had told Gregg what she had done, so that he could say what he liked. A sportsman-like touch, that. But when I told her so she said: "Not at all. I did it for myself as much as for him." But, nevertheless, it was sportsman-like. She *did* do it for him.

When she rose to go she said: "Come along, walk with me a little way. I want to feel the streets and the people close about me again."

"Paris seems good to you, then?"

"Like water when you've been famished," she said. "Whoever it was who said that happiness is the absence of pain knew nothing at all of the human heart. . . . I want to be here where people are—where suffering is, and laughter and courage and fear. I was made for the city, I think."

"You were made for life," I said.

We left the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie,

where a gorgeous *garde de la République*, his long horse-tail plume floating down from his glittering helmet, rode grandly by on his magnificent black steed, like a figure out of the "ancient comedy" itself; we threaded the narrow, veinlike streets, rubbing elbows more and more frequently with men in mud-soaked blue uniforms just in from the front; penetrated by a great artery into the very heart of the city; there where the soldiery of the world passed and repassed and saluted on the streets about us—all the colorful masquerade of the "ancient tragedy."

Crossing the street at the Opéra, an American soldier in his thin khaki uniform, too tight in spots and too loose in others, looking as if it had been made by the village dress-maker got in by the day, stood waiting on the safety station to pass.

"Look!" cried Monica, and saluted, smiling. I saluted, too, and unconsciously Monica and I had saluted French fashion, hand straight at the side, and the soldier gave us as unconsciously the American salute, from the edge of his straight-brimmed campaign hat. It was a reproof and a delight. He had blue eyes and sandy hair, and he smiled—oh, the good, understandable, unsubtle American smile! And something, not easy to express,

but more than easy to understand, made a lump come into our throats to see him standing there.

We looked back to laugh a little at the fit of his jacket; we could so well afford to laugh at that. As Monica faced round again I saw that tears stood in her eyes.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

I DID for her, during that week, such small services as I could. There were her pictures to crate, and the matter of time-tables and steamer reservations that she allowed me to take off her hands. She had all the formalities of *laissez-passer* and passport to go through, simplified, if one could use the word in connection with French formalities, by the fact that her papers still stood in the name of Monica West. She would have had, if asked for proof on the spot, a hard time to prove herself Monica Gregg.

But there was no wish on her part to do that. The papers were, in her present case, a fabulous piece of luck.

At the *pension*, where she had gone back to stay as a matter of course, they believed her departure had something to do with America's declaration of war, and that coincidence was another piece of luck. The Countess Rivat had accused her at once of going "on account of that nice young Monsieur

Gregg." And Monica had let her think that he was in America and that she was going to see him there.

"I couldn't risk her clairvoyance," she said, "by letting her know he was still in France. She'd have seen the whole thing, and told it, too. I'm not sure she doesn't suspect something, as it is."

It did seem incredible that no one should know anything of what had taken place, down there all those weeks in the sun. The Beau Soleil was out of the world! . . . It was as safe as a place in a dream.

Yet figures out of a dream have a way now and then of appearing uncannily in the midst of next day's affairs; and of being, then, disconcertingly logical, not at all at our disposal as they were in the dream.

On Friday of that week we had a sort of farewell luncheon-party for Monica — Mary Lynch and Sturgis and Alice Germaine and Pardee and I. You see, she had to be natural, and pretend that her going home was nothing more than the result of a sudden desire. And I must say she did it exceedingly well.

It was hard to believe, watching her there among us, hearing her caught in the rebound of gaiety, that I hadn't dreamed Gregg and

their marriage and the Beau Soleil. It seemed to me that if I should say, "I had a dream about you last night," and relate the thing as it was, she would only laugh and say, as people do, that dreams were queer, or that they went by opposites; and Sturgis would psycho-analyze it, out-Freuding Freud, and the whole thing would vanish in absurdity.

I could hardly have finished the thought when I saw Monica's face go suddenly white and her eyes fix themselves in actual fright upon some one who was approaching close behind my chair.

Then a hand was laid on my arm, and Major Brooks's voice boomed heartily, "Well, by Jove!" and he seemed to be shaking hands with us both, losing in the confusion of our greeting the name he called Monica. And then—I couldn't blame him, for wasn't it exactly the thing I had done?—he asked directly of Monica, "And where's *Mr. Gregg*?"

Some miracle, no less, kept him from saying "your husband." But he might almost as well have said it, so eloquent was the stress he had put upon the "Mr." One thing only could account for that.

The question struck itself out between two sharp points of silence; every one at the table felt it, and the major felt it, too.



There was just a discernible hesitation on Monica's part before she made her reply. She had it to do; he had asked his question of her. Much as I wished to, I couldn't have answered for her without making it look worse than it did. It seemed to me that there was nothing for it now but to turn our farewell luncheon into an announcement-party. Fate, in the person of Major Brooks, seemed to have willed it so. But a glance at Monica told me that she would submit to no such blundering fate as this. Her courage—though I don't know what else, under the circumstances, she *could* have said—made me gasp.

"Still at Beaulieu," she said, and managed to put into her tone so perfect a blend of interest and finality that it was as if she answered a mere chance inquiry about some mutual acquaintance.

It had the effect, without, I verily believe, deceiving a single person there. But the effect was all, at the moment, she could ask.

"Oh!" said the major, looking quite helplessly apologetic. I don't know, in that moment, what he thought; but I do know that he was recalling to himself vigorously the fact that he was a man of the world, equal to an emergency. Something—Monica's face,

or mine, or both—had revealed the presence of a situation—a situation precipitated by that all too natural question of his.

And the others were trying to look as if they hadn't recognized Gregg's name!

It had taken altogether no more than a minute of actual time, yet it occurred to me suddenly that the major had been standing there endlessly without being introduced, and that Pardee and Sturgis, who had risen, had been waiting also endlessly. The introductions gave Monica time, and it was she who was outwardly easiest of us all when, every one introduced, she inquired of the major if Mrs. Brooks was also in Paris. I think she knew by a kind of instinct how far she could go; and perhaps, too, she argued that a coincidence so unexpected could never repeat itself. At any rate, she had taken the situation into her own hands, and wasn't going to shirk it now. I believe she was sorry for the major, for she had seen, even through her own fright, his sudden embarrassment. She seemed to be saying, "Forgive me for making it so awkward, but I really couldn't avoid it, you see," and the major seemed to be saying the same thing back to her.

When Pardee, a second later, referred to Monica as "Miss West," the poor major actu-

ally flushed. You would have thought it was *his* secret that had been surprised.

He got away as quickly as he decently could, considering the cordiality of his original greeting. A comment or two touching events that had taken place in the world since we had met—a vague look round as if he had suddenly remembered some tremendously important piece of business to which he must immediately attend—then a gallant return to his first cordiality for the farewell. He shook hands with us both again, first with Monica and then with me, and then, as he turned away, he gave me, over his shoulder, one look, for which, when its meaning dawned upon me, I could have throttled him; though an instant later I knew that the poor old major was in no wise to blame. The look assured me that he wouldn't give us away. It included Monica without actually taking her in. It acknowledged, with an air of washing his hands of it, our right to do as we pleased; and admitted, with a final twinkle, that we *had*, by Jove! completely taken *him* in. It was as plain as day that the major believed that Monica and I were in Paris together, and that all along we had been deceiving Gregg!

Well, we couldn't blame the major for be-

lieving what to him had been so obviously proved. How else could he explain our confusion at the mention of Gregg? Considering how highly he had esteemed Gregg, he had really behaved handsomely toward us. He had even, as Monica said afterward, given us odds when he believed we weren't playing fair!

And when he had gone, there were the others plunging about in a conversational bog, trying loyally by their attitude to assure Monica that they hadn't noticed anything wrong. Yet I could actually feel them putting two and two together, and arriving at their conclusion, which, by the way, was not at all the conclusion at which Major Brooks had arrived. They had seen Monica's look of panic when the major appeared, and they had wondered why. And then had come the question about Gregg, with its telltale stress, and the sharp instant of silence afterward, before Monica made her answer. And they all remembered Gregg—remembered those days when he and Monica were seen together everywhere just before he went out to the front. And when Monica replied that he was "still" at Beaulieu—well, *their* conclusion was obvious, too!

I don't know to this day what they thought

about me. Their minds were too much occupied with the main fact, I suppose, to attempt to follow any of the subordinate characters in the plot. From the caution with which they broached the subject to me afterward, I think they had come then to consider me a kind of accomplice.

If they had asked about Gregg, or if they had said one word about the major after he was gone, I shouldn't have been so sure of the importance they were attaching to it all. Their silence convicted them, just as Monica's silence convicted her. And by the relief with which she accepted the conversation about other things, and by the look of entreaty she threw in my direction, when she thought I was going to speak, she imposed silence upon me as well.

Little as I understood its urgency, I had not the heart to disobey that beseeching look. She seemed to beg me to let her have her way, and it was, after all, *her* affair; I wished only to make it easy for her.

And after the first few moments had passed it was too late to say anything. The mischief was already done.

We got through the luncheon somehow, and afterward I walked a few blocks with Monica, saying I would put her on her car.

We began by simply looking at each other as people do after a catastrophe of that sort. And then Monica said, "I'm terribly sorry about the major."

I said she needn't be sorry for him; he had behaved beautifully, and virtue like that was surely its own reward.

"Oh, I was thinking of *you!*" she said. "He thought you were—well, involved."

"That," I said, "was a compliment to me"; but I hated his thinking that about her. I had had all I could do to keep from calling him back and setting it straight.

"I'll never be able to thank either of you enough; you saved me, you two, when I couldn't have saved myself."

I couldn't for the life of me see why she would have been "lost" if the truth had come out. Why she found it so much a matter for gratitude to have been saved from so vindicating a disclosure as had just been threatened. I said something like that to her then, and she stopped perfectly still to say, "You don't see that?"

I confessed that I didn't, and that I hadn't all along.

"Well, you *were* a dear then!" she said, and walked on beside me in silence a little way, as if she were trying to think of some way to make it plain.

"You see," she said, at last, "I had to decide all in a minute what I was going to do. It never occurred to me what I'd be letting you in for with the major. I didn't think of poor you at all. I only thought of myself. I thought, it doesn't matter so much what Major Brooks thinks—he'll probably never see me again; but it *does* matter what *they* think. It matters tremendously."

"But my dear child," I said, astonished, "surely you know what they do think!"

"What?" There was a note almost of challenge in her voice.

"Why, they know now that you and Allan have been the same place, yet you've never mentioned his name. They think the only logical thing—that there's something to be concealed. They believe you've been guilty of—shall I say?—folly; that you didn't want them to know."

"And I hope," said she, "that they go on believing me capable only of folly!"

Not all I could say would move her. She had made her curious resolve. She was thankful, she said, that *that* was what they thought. Anything was better than the fact. I said I could see no harm in the truth; and she said, the truth! Truth was something

which could never have been otherwise; but this was only a fact! One didn't owe allegiance to facts; one owed it only to truth!

The philosophy wasn't exactly plain; I'm not sure that she even meant it to be. What was plain, and what she did mean, was that she must count upon me, whether I understood or not, never to tell of her marriage to Allan Gregg. She seemed possessed of some strange fear of the consequences if they should ever come to know.

"People *believe* so in Allan!" she said.

And that, with no context save its irrelevance and its tone of hopeless irrefutability, came to be my one clue to that fear. Could it be that she feared to measure her truth against their belief? Afraid she might be drawn down again into that dread undercurrent of doubt? Was that, then, what she had meant by owing allegiance only to truth?

Or was she so appalled by her truth that she couldn't conceive others less than appalled by it, too?

Whatever the root of her fear, one could never say it was cowardice. She had kept secret the very thing a coward would have made haste to reveal. She had flung away the one card which most women in her case would have triumphantly played.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

**M**ONICA had been gone more than a week when Sturgis one day broached the subject to me. We had met by chance in the street, and had stopped for a glass of light French beer at one of the small tables outside the Brasserie Universelle, and Sturgis had been saying that Monica must be safely across by now. Other things came in between, but the continuity went on underneath.

"By the way," he said, "was young Gregg, of Duluth, in the south when you were there?"

He put his emphasis, unconsciously, on the word "you."

There was nothing for it but to answer him straight.

"Yes," I said, and something prompted me to add, "He was with me most of the time."

"With you?" His surprise gave him away. And after a little he said, with an air of touching upon a delicate point, "Do you mind if I tell the others that?"

I had to pretend not to see. "Mind?" I said, "Why, certainly not. Why shouldn't you tell?"

"Oh, of course," said Sturgis, floundering a bit, poor fellow. He was as glad as I to do something for Monica. They were fond of her, all of them, and any one of them would have welcomed an explanation. It wasn't the thing itself, I believe, that they cared about; it was the way in which Monica's own attitude, her look of panic, her sudden paleness, her cutting the subject off, had somehow tinctured the disclosure with shame. It was *that* they wished to disprove.

It was in that hope, and not at all in the spirit of curiosity, that Sturgis decided, after a moment of indecision, to venture a closer question still.

"You saw Monica, didn't you?"

"On the Riviera?" I asked, and determined upon a clean open stroke. "Oh yes—yes," I said, "we went about together a good deal, the three of us—she and Gregg and I."

It was good to say it openly—to give it air, so to speak; to bring it into the light.

Sturgis's surprise grew, but his ability to conceal it grew proportionately. He didn't this time ejaculate. He just elevated his eyebrows, as if to say, "Oh, indeed! How

very pleasant!" simulating a perfect expression of anti-climactic interest.

And I sat there sipping light beer and posing as Respectability, as an insurer of the moralities.

It wasn't, of course, entirely cleared up in his mind. I'm inclined to think that it was still further complicated, but the complications at least had rendered it more acceptable, had obscured a little the merciless white light in which the affair had seemed to stand. I thought that in those few minutes Sturgis wavered between the belief that I was deliberately shielding them, and the belief that I didn't really know. There was only an overlay — a veneer that he knew wouldn't last—of the idea that there wasn't, after all, any truth in all this thing they had believed.

At any rate, the others were told. I could tell that he had repeated to them all I had said; and the complications had somehow vindicated and upheld their faith. Sturgis's very manner of asking if he might tell had been a tribute to Monica.

## CHAPTER XXXV

I WAS not surprised to hear Gregg's voice on the telephone. I had been expecting him vaguely for days. Some presentiment, or some purely subconscious calculation, told me that it would be about then he would come. Monica had been gone a little more than two weeks.

He asked, without preface, if I could see him, and when I said yes, he got a taxi and came at once. I could hardly, even then, keep the idea out of my mind that his brevity meant emotion repressed, meant that he was at last deeply stirred.

But when he arrived, looking perhaps a little more reticent, but no more disturbed than usual, I wondered if anything, anything in the world, would ever bring him to life.

He asked, calmly, if I had seen Monica, and when I answered yes, that I had, he did not ask me what she had told, or if she had told anything. He had too much taste for that! He merely said that I knew, then, what had occurred.

I said I knew that she had come up to Paris alone, and that she had left on the next steamer for home.

"Oh!" said he. "When did she sail?"

I told him the name of the steamer, and the date. He must have known of her intention, for he evinced no surprise. And I felt sure he wouldn't have come otherwise. To meet her in Paris was not, apparently, part of his plan.

"I don't pretend to understand Monica," he said. "I suppose I never did."

He took, of course, the view that it was something in *her* that needed to be understood.

"I thought she was happy," he said. "I thought we'd settle down there and live. I had made an offer on a villa, just the place I'd like to have, and I could have got it, too, at the price; the owner was hard pressed for money—lost his fortune when the Germans took Lille. . . . It was the chance of a lifetime—just the kind of place you'd think a woman would like."

"You've given it up?"

"For the present," he said. And it was clear from his tone that his plan was only deferred. He could be delayed, but he would have what he had set his heart upon in the

end. It was amazing how inexorable his slightest desire could seem; how impossible to thwart.

He said he was going back to the States, and when I asked if he meant to enlist, he said, oh no, that he had been fortunate about the draft; they had set the date for June 5th, and his birthday came on the third. "I'm out of it; over the age."

I tell you, he was no more to be stopped by material things than if he had actually been a ghost!

When he went on to say that he was going so as to be there when Monica was ready to come back to him, I found myself prey to the superstitious momentary conviction that she could never escape, that eventually, when he had bided his time, she would have to go back.

Yet I knew full well that he had himself destroyed his power over Monica, and that he should never regain it again. There are barriers more immaterial than any shade, yet against which not even the strongest may avail.

He had come up to Paris just to see me, and was leaving the following day for Bordeaux and home. Yet he had asked me no questions; he had pleaded no case. I

really believe he had come all that way to see me as a kind of formality. Something he thought was the thing to do. A matter again of good taste!

We went that night to the Opéra Comique, and I said good-by to him afterward at the door of his hotel. As I turned to go he made a little gesture of farewell with his hand, and smiled—that sudden boyish smile that began in his eyes and lighted his whole face; and I left him standing there in the doorway, the smile receding to rest again in his eyes.

If I could have thought of a consoling word, I am sure I should have turned back to say it that night. He looked so—out of things, so alone.

For, after all, they are the men one pities—those little, arid-souled men who have known the streets of great cities, who have walked the byways of the world, and have not suffered compassion; whose sight is clear because it has never been blurred with tears, whose hearts are empty because they have never been filled with grief.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

I HAD, after a short while, a letter from Monica:

I am back in my old studio in West Eleventh [she wrote], and it is good to be home—better than I had hoped it would be. I'm at work again; you'll be surprised, I know, to hear that. Preparing for the Autumn Exhibit. Sounds like old times, doesn't it? But these are not old times. Very much new times here. Khaki is beginning to be seen on the streets, but the people still stare. And admirals—I don't know why admirals—have appeared everywhere, and members, I don't any more know why, of the Royal Flying Corps. All the little French restaurants seem just like Paris, with young *pollus*—convalescents, they say—drinking white wine and singing French songs. On the outside, we seem tremendously cosmopolitan. But we're ourselves, just the same. Billions of dollars! Millions of men! Thousands of airplanes! Hundreds of ships! And we stare at one soldier in a khaki uniform!

At the end of the letter she wrote:

Allan has been here to see me. I suppose he told you he would come. He seems, in spite of all I can do, to believe that it's only a woman's mood.



He didn't even ask what was wrong, or if he had done anything; didn't seem to think it worth while, and he's gone back to Duluth, as if he had only to wait! I was really sorry for him, he was so sure.

If she could be sorry for him instead of afraid, I knew there was nothing further for her to fear. Work and solitude, and the old familiar rooms, had wrought their cure upon her, and she was herself again, reliant, clear-visioned, strong. Getting ready for the Autumn Exhibit—well, it did sound like old times! I wondered if she was painting anything new.

A sheaf of letters had come by the same post, as they did in those days when there was only one steamer a week. I had opened Monica's among the first, and now, looking over the others, I found one addressed in Perryman's hand. So I opened it next, and after his customary greeting, read:

. . . I may see you in Paris before the year is out. I've enlisted. Dropped everything, and enlisted yesterday. I'd thought I *couldn't* do it now, until a few days ago when I talked with Allan Gregg. You know, of course, he's come back. It wasn't anything he said; it was knowing what he'd been through over there, and his taking it as he did, as if it were nothing at all, the fact that he *had* so little to say, made me ashamed. And I made up my mind then and there to enlist, and I went out and did it the very next day.

It's men like Gregg who are going to win this war. I don't know yet what he plans to do; he said he hadn't made up his mind; but I have an idea he knows pretty well. He has gone out to Duluth to see his parents before he decides. . . .

Let me know if you should change your address. Things are warming up over here.

Yours,

PERRYMAN.

And they were written, those two letters, about the same man! Perryman's faith not only remained unshaken, but it had increased. Were Monica and I the only two people in all the world who had ceased to believe in him? Must we listen always silently to other people's praise?

In the two or three brief notes I had from Monica that summer she did not mention Gregg. She was tremendously busy, it seemed, with all sorts of war reliefs, on the go night and day, yet finding time somehow "for a little work of my own."

In the one short letter I had from Gregg he in turn made no mention of Monica. He said that he was in Duluth, that he was well, and that he had no plans as yet. He inclosed, without comment, a clipping from a Duluth daily.

It was headed: "Duluth Hero Returns

from Battlefield," and went on through two columns to tell of the return of "our young townsman, Allan Gregg, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bolder Gregg," who had been "facing death for the past eight months on the French front." He had been, it appeared, the guest of honor at the clubs, at the Chamber of Commerce, and "present on the platform" at some big patriotic rally. The interviewer spoke of "the modesty of the true hero," and of the many young men in Duluth who had, because of Gregg's example, offered their lives to the country. There followed the names of the latest and best-known recruits. And a final glowing tribute of praise for Gregg, "It is of such sons that Duluth may well be proud."

I searched both sides of the clipping, and read over the letter again, looking for some clue to the spirit in which he had inclosed that eulogy. But there was none.

It was the first bit of vanity I had ever known Gregg to display, and I wondered if it could have been there all the time, or whether it was merely his simplicity. Now that I had ceased reading between his lines I saw how completely, how frankly, he had always revealed all there was to reveal. Oh, he was candor itself!

## CHAPTER XXXVII

**T**HAT summer Paris was filled with young American soldiers in khaki, like the one we had seen near the Opéra in May. Pershing had come in June, and after that an increasingly steady stream had poured into France.

My work had expanded and enlarged, to meet the need as it grew, until the whole summer was consumed. But in the fall my summons came. I was to go to Washington, and thereafter the work was to be carried on from that end, an arrangement which I had long desired.

I sailed in October, after I had seen two old school friends, now officers in the new army of the United States, installed in the studio in the Rue del'Ancienne Comédie, which had been my home through so many happy but now strangely dimmed years.

On board the steamer I unfolded for the first time the formidable lot of clippings that had arrived from New York the day before

I left. Among them I found three or four reviews of the Autumn Exhibit.

An entirely new lot, the painters seemed, with here and there an old name sounding a little strange. And in each of the reviews Monica's name—a new-comer, they called her—recurring, and the names of her three “war canvases,” “*Les Mutilés*,” “Still Life,” and “*La Marseillaise*.” One critic spoke of them as “the best recruiting agents in New York.”

“But the most interesting canvas of the Exhibition,” he went on to say, “is a picture of an altogether different type by the same artist. The one she has called ‘The Collector.’ One feels here the force of some subtlety not made plain; some mystery unrevealed. A picture painted, one feels, with an ironic brush. It is a picture one goes back to see.”

Monica had said nothing of this. I knew at once that it had been a deliberate omission—she was too sure of my interest to overlook that piece of news. Why, I wondered, had she chosen not to tell? My curiosity grew, and I promised myself to see the picture as soon as possible after I reached New York.

Accordingly, on the day of my arrival, with several days to spare before I had to go

on to Washington, I called up Monica's number on the telephone; but I got no answer, and so decided to wait until noon, when she would be more likely to be in.

I had written ahead to Perryman, who had gone to camp early in July, and a letter was waiting for me at my hotel, saying that he had sailed. He was tremendously enthusiastic about getting into the fight. I could imagine that Perryman would make an admirable soldier, for his enthusiasms, once aroused, could lead him anywhere. He was not the only one of my old friends who was missing from his usual place; I heard that first day of many had already gone.

There seemed to me at first glance almost as many uniformed men on the streets as in Paris, but giving altogether, after Paris, a little the effect of a second company dress rehearsal, all so unseasoned and conscious and new; yet looking somehow, each one, as if already they had caught the thrill of the heroic tragedy for which they were cast.

And there was something new in the faces of all the people—of the men and women one met—like the faces of children who had heard whispered for the first time the meaning and mystery of life.

I felt suddenly glad I had come; over-

whelmed, all at once, also like a child who had been away for a long time and had not known how much he had missed his home.

At noon I tried Monica's number again, with no better result, and, having the afternoon free, I decided to go round to the Exhibition alone, and perhaps I should find her there. At any rate, I should get a look at the picture, and that was the thing I wished particularly. I had a kind of notion that she might prefer that I see it alone.

Fifth Avenue, as I walked up from the hotel, was like a river on a regatta day. Flags and pennants, all bright, varicolored, and self-consciously new, blew out briskly in the clean, fresh wind; a wind tempered by the brilliant winter sun as if it blew over cool water. And an exhilaration, an air of expectancy, seemed to run the whole length of the street, as if an exciting contest were about to begin.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

**I**N the gallery, as I entered, groups of people stood about, making of themselves little detached compositions before each picture.

I looked among them for Monica, but she was not there, so I went on alone, to find, conspicuously and admirably hung, facing the entrance to the third gallery, the three big canvases I had watched come to life in the north room at Madame Gironde's.

They called to me, like old friends, suddenly, from the end wall. Greeted me, familiarly, over the heads of the flattering crush.

I crossed, and paid my respects. It was good to see them there, admired and, one could see, making their simple, straightforward appeal. It was true what the enthusiastic critic had said. People turned from those pictures with a kind of solemnity, as if they had made a resolve.

But glad as I was to find them, it was not those old friends that I had come most to see. It was the new picture of which, for



some reason of her own, she had not wished to tell. Still, she had allowed it to be hung publicly; perhaps, after all, her not telling had been a mere oversight. It had been, as a matter of fact, only my own conceit that had made me so sure of her sharing the news of her work.

I had purchased no catalogue, preferring to recognize the picture by the familiarity of Monica's style.

It was not in the third gallery, and I went on to the next. From the door my eyes circled the walls; then I stepped inside and, turning, the picture faced me from its place near the door.

It was hung modestly, yet it dominated the wall. And there was over the picture itself a kind of calm, a reticence, yet, seeing it, one saw nothing else near. All the bright-colored medley about seemed merely to emphasize the arresting quality of its repose.

It was the portrait of a frail young man in gray, with a particularly vivid tie which served only to accentuate the paleness of his face, seated beside a table, upon which, just out of reach of his slender, gentle hand, seven alabaster boxes were set in a row; and through each of those boxes could be seen a suggestion of something inside, glow-

ing softly or brightly or somberly, according to its luster. One box only stood empty. No glow came through the white semi-transparency of the alabaster. And that was strangely the most conspicuous box of them all, though they were of uniform size, and set evenly, precisely almost, one after another in a row.

Gregg's eyes looked down calmly, but did not meet my own.

And I had, before any other reaction, the curious impression that he was *enjoying* being there, surrounded by all those serious, puzzled faces of the visitors.

So that was why she had not told! She had not, perhaps, known how to tell.

I stood there before it, jostled a little now and then by the people who came and went.

It was true, she had painted with an "ironic brush"; but there was a kind of tenderness in it, too, as if now and then she had dipped her brush in pigment she had not intended to use. It was that, I think, which puzzled the spectator more, even, than the mystery of the seven boxes. A great deal was being said those days about the limitations of women painters, and I reflected, standing there, that only a woman could have put into that picture its strange, subconscious subtlety; could

have so blended into harmony all those opposing reactions and emotions, and overlaid them all with that delicate yet passionate irony.

It was uncanny, that critic's hitting upon the word. How much could it be he had understood? What, exactly, had he meant? What was it that brought yonder old man, and that young girl, back from the next gallery to stand before the picture again, and consult first their catalogues and then one another's faces with so cautious and wondering an air? Why did the young man with the artist's beard and the long, black ribbons depending from his eye-glass stand staring so steadily and so belligerently upward, as if challenging that calm pictured face to explain himself and his seven alabaster boxes. And that eager, pretty lady with the crinkly hair, looking at the picture with so bright and friendly an expression, as if by assuming a receptive attitude she would cajole the mystery into the open. And the others—the *cognoscenti*—grouped a little apart, deep in subdued discussion, with quick, critical glances in the direction of the picture, to verify a point. What, I wondered, were *they* seeing in it? What were they finding to say?

A hand was laid on my arm. I turned, and

Monica stood beside me, the color whipped up in her cheeks, her eyes deep and shining from the out-of-doors.

"Come away," she said; and I knew at once that she feared some one might overhear what we should inevitably have to say.

She drew me away, and I went with her across the gallery, where we stood, looking back, as if we were casual visitors seeking perspective.

Not until we were half-way across had she dared even to ask me when I had arrived and why I had come, and to welcome me with a little warm pressure of her gloved hand.

"So you've come, too, like every one else."

"Surprised?" I asked.

"No," said she, "I wasn't expecting you, but I'm not surprised at anything, here."

When we had reached our point of safety and turned, she watched me a moment in silence; her eyes went with mine to the picture, and came back to my face again. Then she spoke, a kind of pleading urgency in her voice:

"Tell me, is it so plain?"

My face, I suppose, had betrayed me; and no denial, no pretense of not seeing, could possibly do any good. So I said, "It's plain to me, Monica, I think, because—"

"Oh, to *you!*" she cut me off. "*You were there!*" (I knew she meant that day of the alabaster box; and I was ready to ask, in my turn, "Was it so plain?"—for apparently she had known even then that the same vision had passed before us both.) "I hadn't counted," she went on, "on your seeing the picture at all; I didn't know you would be coming over this year. But you really don't matter; you're the one person in the world who could understand. It's the others—those people over there." She made a gesture to take in the shifting group across the room.

"You don't think," I said, "that it's plain to them?"

"I don't know. I'm not at all sure. You can't write your innermost secret on the wall like that, and expect people not to see it!" she said.

"Why did you do it?" I asked.

"Why? . . . For the reason I painted it, I suppose! Because I couldn't *help* doing it; because it seemed, somehow, to *have to be said*. . . . Just as you might say something out loud in a crowd, something that had nothing to do with them, that only mattered to you, yet it cried out to be said; . . . and you thought, because it *didn't* matter to them, and they

were all talking so loud about their own affairs, that they couldn't possibly hear, that you were safe. . . . And then, suddenly, you discovered that every one had stopped talking to listen to you!"

"You shouldn't have made it a work of art."

"Is it one?" she asked, so sincerely that it was half pathetic, and as if she hadn't been able, for some reason, to credit the verdict of the others, but she might, if she could believe me honest, credit me. "I can't see it—objectively, you know. To me it's just—Allan—as Allan is, I mean. I'd have withdrawn it the first day, when I saw they were going to notice it, if it hadn't seemed so—so cowardly. And now it's too late."

"Too late?" Something had happened, then; something to make her afraid.

"Yes, too late. One by one they come, and I find them there, as I found you to-day, looking at it—"

"Who?" I asked. "Who has come?"

"Allan's mother, for one," she said.

"His *mother!*" It startled even me. "Here?"

"Here, here in this room. I found her standing there before it, one day, just as I found you. But she wasn't the first."

It had begun, she said, on the third day of the Exhibit. On the morning of that day she had been attracted to a young woman standing before the picture in an attitude of utter absorption—a pretty young woman, with a live, humorous face, a half-smile on her lips, and a little puzzled frown between her eyes. Turning her head suddenly, she had surprised Monica's interested regard. Whereupon they had smiled at each other, and the stranger spoke. Her voice, Monica said, made her lovelier still.

"What do you say," she asked, "is inside the boxes?"

Moved by some venturesome impulse, Monica answered, "In the first one, I've an idea there's a little Damascene shield, made in a very special design."

A curious expression had swept over the other's face, as if she had seen a light.

"I'll tell you what's in the next one!" she cried. "It's a tiny pair of Battersea-enamel candlesticks, green and shell pink! Am I right?"

And Monica had recognized, in astonishment, the candlesticks he had described to her, exquisite trifles, bought long ago.

"You know him?" she asked.

The other nodded, pointing then to the

empty box. "Why—why is there nothing in this?"

And, impelled in spite of herself, Monica answered: "That—was meant for a woman, but she escaped."

"There should be *two* empty ones, then," said the stranger; and Monica knew who she was. The first wife, the "butterfly," who had also escaped, long ago, from her alabaster box!

What passed between them after that Monica did not tell; nor could I even guess what things two women in such a situation might find to say to one another. I could imagine them standing there together, imagine myself watching them from a distance, and wondering what they were saying, with Gregg looking calmly down from his frame upon them, but refusing to meet their eyes.

She only smiled reminiscently when I asked her what had come of it, if she had ever seen her again, and said, "Oh no, not after that day." I had a queer kind of impression, I don't know why, that they might have gone out to lunch together, or tea. Women do just such inexplicable things. But I don't, as a matter of fact, really *believe* they did.

At any rate that encounter had given rise to no especial uneasiness in Monica's mind.



It had seemed strange enough, to be sure, and unusual, but nothing further than that. Not until Allan's mother appeared had she begun to be afraid. That seemed a little too much. Though, of course, the Exhibit that year was being talked of everywhere, and had been given the widest publicity, so that every one who came to New York—every one, that is, who pretended at all to keep up, or who wanted just to do the right thing—was to be found soon or late in those rooms.

It had been little more than a week since the day when Monica, dropping in for a moment on her way up-town, had seen an attendant pointing her out for the benefit of a stout, elderly little woman in brown velvet and a sable stole, who had turned from her contemplation of the picture and was already going forward to meet Monica.

"I beg your pardon," she began, "but—are you the artist—?"

She didn't say what artist, but one agitated hand was pointing unconsciously toward the portrait of Gregg.

"Yes," said Monica, "I am Miss West."

"You painted it?" She was still pointing, and retreating backward toward the picture, and when Monica, wondering what it could mean, nodded and said again that she had,

the lady exclaimed, as if she were contradicting her:

"But it's my son! My son, Allan Gregg!"

Monica had managed, somehow, to recover her own composure sufficiently to say, without the formality of asking the lady's name, since it was all too preposterously plain:

"Yes, it is Mr. Allan Gregg."

"Did you *know* him?" the mother cried.

"Yes," Monica said, "I knew him."

"Where? Not here in New York?"

And Monica answered truthfully, "No; I knew him in France."

"But he's never said anything to me about having his portrait painted! Did he pose for it, you know—time after time?"

And Monica, still quite truthful, and quite inexplicably calm, answered: "No, I painted from memory. Your son, Mrs. Gregg, has a very unusual face."

She had not, Monica said, even asked about the alabaster boxes, or what they meant. She had grown accustomed, it is to be supposed, to taking a good many things for granted in the way of art. She had lost her agitation gradually, suppressing it as if she wished Monica to know that she had herself perfectly in hand. She had been reading about "The Collector" in the New York

papers, and she was a bit confused as to whether Monica or Allan should be credited with fame. But whichever it was, she herself seemed to be caught quite unexpectedly within its pleasant rays.

She had commented on the name of the picture, holding the catalogue open in her hand at the place. "Allan was always collecting things. I suppose he told you that!"

And then, Monica said, she had smiled, a winning, youthful smile—a smile that began in the depths of her faded blue eyes, and quickly lighted her whole face, reminding one suddenly of how she must have looked as a little girl—and then it receded slowly until it rested again in her eyes.

That smile had been, Monica confessed, the most unnerving part of the interview.

"It was a little dreadful," she said, "to discover that *that* wasn't even his own. That it had meant nothing, nothing whatever all the time!"

In the end Mrs. Gregg had asked Monica to tea at the Waldorf, where she and her husband were stopping. They were in New York on some kind of business trip.

Monica had managed, somehow, to evade any definite promise; her time, she pleaded,

was really not her own, and every hour of the day was occupied.

"But I don't know," said she, "how long I shall escape."

"Are they still here?"

"Oh yes, and, naturally, you see, she has the idea that I'm interested in her son!"

## CHAPTER XXXIX

**F**OUR days later, when I returned from Washington with the winter's campaign laid out before me, the inevitable, so far as Monica was concerned, had occurred. Gregg had arrived in New York.

His mother had written a letter contrived expressly to bring him. She had told him about the picture, and inclosed clippings. She had managed to convey the idea that Monica, whom she spoke of enthusiastically as "a charming girl," must be very much interested in a man to paint his portrait from memory. It was clear enough that this interest found favor with the lady.

Gregg had showed the letter to Monica, in explanation of his presence when he arrived, unannounced, at her studio. It had been his luck to find her at home.

I had the story, of course, from Monica, in such sequence and detail as she chose to give.

He had simply, she said, "appeared," and

in answer to her startled demand as to what had brought him, he had told her that he had "come because his mother had written him about the portrait at the Exhibition."

Monica asked if he had seen it, then, and he answered, yes, that day; he had stopped on his way down.

"And then," Monica said, "I said that certainly *he* must have understood what it meant. And he said he thought he had; that he believed his mother had interpreted it for him. And he gave me her letter, and stood there waiting while I read!"

She stopped, and waited so long that I finally asked what she had done then.

"Then?" she said. "What *could* I do? I did what any human being under the circumstances would have done. I laughed! And then I explained that I wasn't laughing because it was funny—I really didn't *feel* like laughing, you know—but there was nothing else to be done. It was so—<sup>1</sup>hopeless; so utterly useless to try to explain."

It was then, it seemed, that he had threatened to tell. He had an idea that if people should come to know of their marriage, she would go peaceably out to Duluth. At least that must have been what he thought. He said there was no reason why they shouldn't

be married over again, now that his mother had met Monica and admired her so much! No reason why they shouldn't say they had been engaged in France.

And Monica said there was none, except that she had no intention, then or ever, of going back to him. And he replied, with his maddening composure, that that was what she thought *now*. And then, without even the loss of his temper, he had retired from the attack; not at all as if he were beaten, but as if, for the sake of the ultimate victory, he deemed it good strategy to temporarily retreat.

"What I shall never be able to fathom," said Monica, "is why he *wants* me back."

She had asked him that, it seems, and his answer had been, "Because you are my wife." Not because he loved her, but because he never gave up a treasure once he had acquired it as his own. His was a dependable taste which did not change with the wind.

Well, whatever else might be said of Gregg, he was, at any rate, consistently true to himself. He had never learned the uses of duplicity. I can believe that in all his life he had never knowingly lied. He had merely remained silent when he did not wish to reveal.

And so he had left her, quite convinced, in

spite of all she had said, that she would one day change her mind. Until then, he could wait.

I confess that I foresaw complications. I had a kind of apprehension that he might detect an ally in his mother, and confide in her for the purpose of enlisting her help. Or he might enlist her, without the confidence. The mother could have added terribly to Monica's embarrassments.

As it turned out, the situation was embarrassing enough.

Within the next two days Gregg, who frequented the exhibit, had been discovered as the original of "The Collector," and a critic had sought him out for an interview.

Although [he wrote] Mr. Gregg, the original of the famous "Collector," is in reality a connoisseur, an amateur collector of sorts, he says that he has never, strangely enough, owned an alabaster box. The seven boxes, according to Mr. Gregg, are a conception entirely of the artist's own, and have no symbolic value, so far as he knows. Which would corroborate Miss West's own statement, a little skeptically received, that the alabaster boxes were put in merely for the sake of an attractive composition. If this be true, it is a striking instance of the power of Art to stimulate imagination, and we arrive again at the old axiom that Reality is in the eye of the beholder.

It was the day after the appearance of this



interview that I saw Gregg. I had decided not to look him up, since he had no way of knowing of my presence in New York, unless he had chanced to see the passenger-list of my steamer, which wasn't likely. I had no wish to see him, and less wish to complicate the situation for them, which I might easily have done. And I didn't want to have to meet Gregg's mother, or his father, and to be forced, as I should necessarily have been with them, into the rôle of hypocrite.

So, having decided that, I went out and walked straight into Gregg on the street. I was, as a matter of fact, almost as much surprised as he. I told him, in answer to his inquiry, why I had come, and then I asked, naturally enough, about his own plans.

"I haven't made any," he said, and then added that he had come on to New York to see a portrait Monica was exhibiting of him, and asked me if I had seen it. I said yes, every one, apparently, had. There was an undoubted note of satisfaction, almost of pride, in his answer: "I believe it's making a great success. Well, Monica can't do bad work." The beginning of the smile came in his eyes. "People," he said, "seem to be wondering a lot about the boxes. I know where she got the idea."

"You do?" My astonishment drew from him just a shade of impatience.

"*You* ought to remember. You were there. It was that day in Nice, in the antique-shop—when I found an alabaster box. That put the idea in her mind, whether she remembers it or not."

Whether she remembered it or not! And I had been for an instant confronted by the possibility of his actually having seen!

I had been on my way to an appointment when I met Gregg, and he had turned in to walk along at my side, since we were going in the direction of his hotel.

And now, as he was going on to ask me if I, too, didn't recall the episode, the droning hum of an areoplane caught our ears. The sight was still rare enough in New York to make citizens stop and look. We stopped, as every one did, and looked up to see the plane come into view over the top of a high, cream-colored building, and, its heavy drone increasing to a roar, pass directly overhead, and begin to mount, by long swinging stages, upward and away.

"I'd like to go up," said Gregg, watching the plane recede to a tiny speck against the blue.

My eyes came down at once from the sky

to rest upon Gregg's face, still turned upward, absorbed in that reappearing speck.

"Why would you like it?" I asked, allowing, I am afraid, my involuntary amazement to show in my voice. There was something—I couldn't then, and can't now, say what—unexpected about his statement; something that didn't seem, as nearly as I can put it, quite native to Gregg; like a quality, a characteristic, reversed. I couldn't imagine Allan Gregg even *wanting* to fly.

And I still felt there was something alien about it when he said, bringing his gaze down at last, and, speaking in his slow, emotionless voice: "Oh, I don't know exactly *why*. I'd like to do it, that's all. Once would satisfy me, I think."

The moment stands out with peculiar insistence in my memory—Gregg standing there at the edge of the curb, with his upturned face, yearning after that alien experience. He seemed somehow like a pitifully pampered child who had thrown down expensive toys to yearn for the moon.

He left me a few moments after that, when we reached the door of his hotel, and I did not see him again. I know he thought I would call or telephone, and he had not asked me where I was.

I believe he stayed in town a week longer—until the close of the Exhibition, in fact. Monica did not go near the gallery all that week and gave out to the managers that she would be away for the remainder of the time.

On the day the Exhibit closed she received a note from Mrs. Gregg, expressing regret at not seeing her again, saying that she had been disappointed to learn that Monica was out of town, and it was her hope to renew their acquaintance at some future time. A conventional little note, but showing the trend. I have always wondered what Gregg told her about Monica. She must have questioned him closely enough. At any rate, one could be sure that he hadn't involved himself in any over-long story of evasion. He would let her think what she liked; but he would do no more than answer her questions; and even then I doubt if he found it necessary to tell a lie. For it would hardly occur to her to ask whether he had married Monica!

They went back together, then, the three Greggs, mother, father, and son, to the upholstered house in Duluth.

## CHAPTER XL

**A**LL that was in the autumn of 1917. The winter that followed was one of revelations and change. Spring found us all where we had not expected to be. I was in the army; Monica was filling capably what had been a man's place; and Gregg— But of that I shall tell last, as it came.

I had gone into the army in February, drafted, literally, by my conscience. I had called myself for reclassification, and that was the result. In the beginning, I had been asked to do work which required a man of specialized experience; I possessed that experience, and I was on the spot. Few men who were free as I was to serve had the necessary training; and service was the thing. But now the work was systematized; other men could carry it on. And abstract service was, somehow, no longer the beginning and the end. I had seen boys going, lads who yesterday had passed me with school-books flung over their shoulders, who had asked me

for help with their algebra, and who had looked up to me as wiser, stronger than they; these lads were marching away, their young faces bewildered and grave, to die in a war which we, their elders, had done nothing to avert. Their innocence had not absolved them. My blindness should not absolve me.

And so the reclassification was made—1A, engaged in an occupation essential to the war, but not indispensable to that occupation.

Just how indispensable is proved by the fact that it was Monica who took over my work—did it efficiently and well, as many women discovered they could do.

The winter had brought her name into prominence. She could have built greatly upon it for herself. But it was a day in which ambition was reversed. A whole nation, nurtured and bred in the competition of getting, turned now to a stupendous competition of giving. To build for oneself was to be lost. Gifts like Monica's could only be saved by giving them away.

Her three war pictures were being sent about the country, the nucleus of a similar group, like evangelists preaching from city to city their gospel of pity and consecration.

Yet Monica complained that she was giving nothing so long as her reputation was being

added to. She was like an anonymous giver who will have no favor of his gifts.

When I told her what I was going to do, that I had made up my mind to enlist, and explained, or tried to explain why, her understanding ran ahead of my words, and she cried at the end, "You don't know how I envy you!" Yet if there was any one who hated war more than I, I believe it was Monica.

I think it occurred to me then for the first time that she might take my place; and I asked her if she would consider it.

"I? I take your place? Do you think I *could*?"

"Why not?" I asked.

And that question, for us as well as for the department heads who had the appointment to make, seemed to fail of an adequate answer. They had asked me to make a recommendation, and I named Monica. Within a week I was in camp and Monica sat at my desk in New York.

## CHAPTER XLI

**I**T was in March that we had the news about Gregg. It came in a letter from his mother to Monica, and a marked copy of the same Duluth daily.

I had gone into town on leave, and in response to a note from Monica, which had reached me two days before, asking about some unfinished detail of the work, I called round to see her about eleven o'clock.

The door of her little cubbyhole of an office had always stood hospitably open heretofore. To-day it was closed, and my first thought was that Monica had gone out. But the busy little stenographer, who had also been my stenographer, said no, Miss West was in.

"I'll tell her you are here," she said, and with a light tap she went in, closing the door after her, but coming out directly again, with the door held open for me to pass.

Monica stood in the center of the room, her back turned, as I entered; but, hearing my step, she faced about.



"Come in, Gilbert," she said, and held out her hand.

I could see at once that she had suffered some shock.

She went across and closed the door after the little stenographer. And then she came back and stood by her chair. There were no papers scattered about as usual; there was no air of my having interrupted any work, as there had always been before.

She seemed just for a second then to forget that I was there, and to be following to its end some subterranean train of thought which had occupied her before I came. It was the intensity of her abstraction, rather than its duration, which made me immediately ask what was wrong.

"Sit down, Gilbert," she said, and reached out and shifted a chair. Then she sat down herself before the desk.

"Something has happened?" I asked.

She looked at me suddenly then, with a little abrupt turn of her head in my direction.

"Yes—to Allan," she said.

"To Allan?"

"He has been killed."

I did not, could not speak. Beyond the horror in my face I gave, I suppose, no sign that I had even heard. Allan Gregg killed!

She had said it as if much repetition had destroyed for her its climactic effect.

And now she added, as if to explain somehow the violence of her news: "It happened ten days ago. An accident."

I think I had a kind of premonition of what she was going to say before ever I asked, "How?"

"In an—aeroplane," she said.

And that she said as if *it* had been, and still remained, the climax for her. . . . For her, as it was for me.

I could see him as plainly as I had seen him that day, standing at the edge of the curb, his gaze turned skyward toward that swinging aeroplane; and I could hear him as plainly as then saying, "I'd like to go up."

The memory came between me and Monica's strangely questioning look, with which she seemed to be searching what I believed.

"How did you hear?" I asked. "And when?"

"A letter came from his mother—yesterday."

"His mother?"

"Yes. She sent the paper with the account."

She opened a drawer in the desk and took out a letter, open, and a newspaper that had

been folded and rolled, and laid them both on the square blue desk blotter before her. "Here," she said, "it all is." And then, as if she must settle that one thing before anything else, she asked: "Did Allan ever say anything to you about aviation?"

"About going into it, you mean?"

"Yes, about wanting to fly."

I made some answer qualifying my not altogether untruthful nor yet quite truthful no. I couldn't tell her part without telling all. She would have had it from me in the end. And somehow, for his sake, or hers, or perhaps for my own, I did not want to tell.

I could give him, now at least, the benefit of the doubt.

I asked then why she had wished to know, *had* he wanted to fly? And she said, dropping again into that deep secret meditation, and gazing down without seeing at the paper and the letter lying there, "I wonder! . . . I can't seem to believe it, somehow."

"Do they say so?" I asked.

She nodded, and handed the paper over to me.

There was something so simple, so child-like, in her action, and in her slight young figure in the massive office chair, that I was brought suddenly to realize that I had of-

ferred no word of sympathy; I had said nothing—nothing, that is, that a friend might be expected to say. Remembering how she had loved him, I knew that the news of his death had shocked her beyond her own belief. Her face was stricken, yet possessed. Well, I, too, had been shocked beyond *my* belief. Allan Gregg had been more than acquaintance—more even than friend—

“I haven’t said what I should, Monica,” I said. “It’s been too—”

“Don’t!” she interrupted, sudden hot tears in her eyes and trying to steady her lips with a faint, tremulous smile; “I don’t want to cry.”

So, to help her, I took up the paper and smoothed it out to the marked column on the first page. But before I began to read I heard her voice, speaking softly, as if to herself:

“He shouldn’t have tried; he shouldn’t ever have tried!”

It came from the depths of her concentration, and my silence answered her best.

She sat there thinking deeply to herself while I read.

According to the newspaper account, this is what had occurred: Gregg had gone to visit an aviation-field, where he found an old acquaint-

ance, Captain Lessing, formerly of the Ambulance Service, stationed as instructor. While watching the fliers going through their practice maneuvers, Gregg had expressed the desire to go up himself, and Captain Lessing, who was an expert airman, had agreed to take him.

They had risen steadily to a height of about three thousand feet, and were sailing evenly along the air, when the plane was seen to wheel and nose suddenly down, and to drop, spinning, straight toward the earth. Within two hundred feet of the ground Captain Lessing was seen to regain some small control and to try to straighten out enough to break the worst of the shock; but the machine plowed up the earth for fifty feet before it came to a stop. And then the spectators had seen Captain Lessing step from his seat with no more damage than a broken arm, caused by the jamming of part of the machinery. But when they went to examine Gregg they found him dead.

"It will never be known," continued the account, "whether the shock of the landing caused his death or whether he died before he reached the earth. The fact that not a mark was found upon his body would incline to the latter belief."

There followed a short and sincere eulogy.

It recounted his valor, his modesty, and the pathos of his early taking away.

"There is little doubt," it went on, "that he contemplated entering the air service of his country; for it is recalled how a year ago, without a word to any one outside his own family, he followed the call of his conscience to the aid of suffering humanity. A few months more and his courage would have winged its way over the battle-fields of France. Yet all those who knew him will accord him the hero's death. That it came between two heroic adventures—the one from which he had so lately returned, and the one to which he had not yet gone—will not rob him of his laurels in the hearts of his friends. . . . He did much himself, and was an inspiration to others to do. What more may be said of a man?"

There it ended.

Death itself, after all, had wielded the ironic brush.

I felt Monica's regard upon me; and seeing that I had finished, she spoke.

"It's true—what they say. He's done more than any of us."

"Yes," said I, "it *is* true. He has."

And presently, reminded by the letter still in her hand, I asked how his mother had come to write.

"They want to buy the picture," she said.

I had a moment's almost terrified vision of that picture looking down upon those two old people from the wall in that upholstered house in Duluth.

"Surely," I said, "you couldn't let them do that!"

"I couldn't sell it to them," said she. "I'm going to send it to them as a gift."

"Not," I protested, "as it is!"

She smiled at me, still sadly, and shook her head.

"As it is," she said, "I've had since yesterday to think it out, and I've come to see that it's only—a portrait of Allan, to us all."

## CHAPTER XLII

**T**O-DAY the picture hangs in a room of that upholstered house in Duluth; and one feels that there it has found its supremely appropriate place, for it may help, perhaps, to assuage the loneliness, and minister a little to the pride of the solitary old pair who inhabit the house.

The wheel has revolved again, and we move once more in our old colors against the pale background of peace. Men have recovered from grievous wounds, have put on civilian dress, and gone back to their offices, and there is nothing to distinguish them from men who stayed safely at home, unscathed. To every outward appearance they are just the same as before. And to every outward appearance, we are all just the same, but we know in our hearts it is not so.

One's memories of those four violent years have begun to emerge and arrange themselves, have begun to fall into place, to assemble within the frame, from which one may stand



thankfully at last a little away. And out of that pageant of youthful death, the passing of Allan Gregg remains for me the most poignant, the most tragic and unhappy of them all. I have wondered if it be only because of contrast that my memory of him during that time stands out so insistently in detail—a figure of neutral gray thrown into relief by the tumultuous blood-red background of war, that background against which the figures of heroic, sacrificial youth could scarcely be discerned, for it was made up of the color of their deeds against the sky.

In those terrible days at the end I saw many men killed, men far worthier than Gregg, men who loved life passionately, and had much to give to life. Yet there was something clean-cut, defiant, and beautiful in the way they died, and I am haunted by none of them as I am haunted by the memory of Gregg.

Last week Perryman came home. He had been too seriously ill to come before. Even now he walks most carefully; and when I went to grasp his hand, it was a strange, gloved, too graceful hand, without warmth, which he held out to me. But the warmth was in his eyes.

I took him one afternoon to see Monica.

I telephoned her to say that I was bringing him, and to give her the chance, if she wished, to make an excuse. But something in her voice, as she said at once for us to come, assured me that whatever he might say could be no longer either awkward or amiss. She had worn no badge of her widowhood, and the hurt she suffered, so far as one is able to tell, is healed. Outwardly she, too, like the rest, is just the same as before.

Inevitably, and as I think we both expected he should, Perryman spoke of Gregg. He had remembered Monica's name in the reviews, and he took for granted her interest. Of my sympathy he was already sure. And with his very first words he had brought to life the old first Gregg, that gentle spirit we had loved, and in whom we had so instinctively, so wholly believed! And it was strangely with no sense of its incongruity that we greeted his presence there. Nor was it with any sense of surprise that I realized in Monica's quiet, unstrained response, that for her a gradual unforeseen transmutation of memories had been taking place, accomplishing itself in her mind. In the death of that other Gregg she had found again the Gregg of her old belief. The Gregg she had loved.

And a thing was made plain to me which of

late had troubled more than once my insistent memory of Gregg—the recurring, half-formed thought that, perhaps, after all, there was something he did wish to say; something which no one could have said for him; something which now would never be said.

THE END



